

# interzone/34

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

MARCH/APRIL  
1990

*All 'New-Star'  
Issue:*

*Keith Brooke*

*Richard Calder*

*Nicola Griffith*

*Ian Macleod  
and others.*

*The Big Sellers:*

*Anne McCaffrey*

*Lucius Shepard  
interviewed*

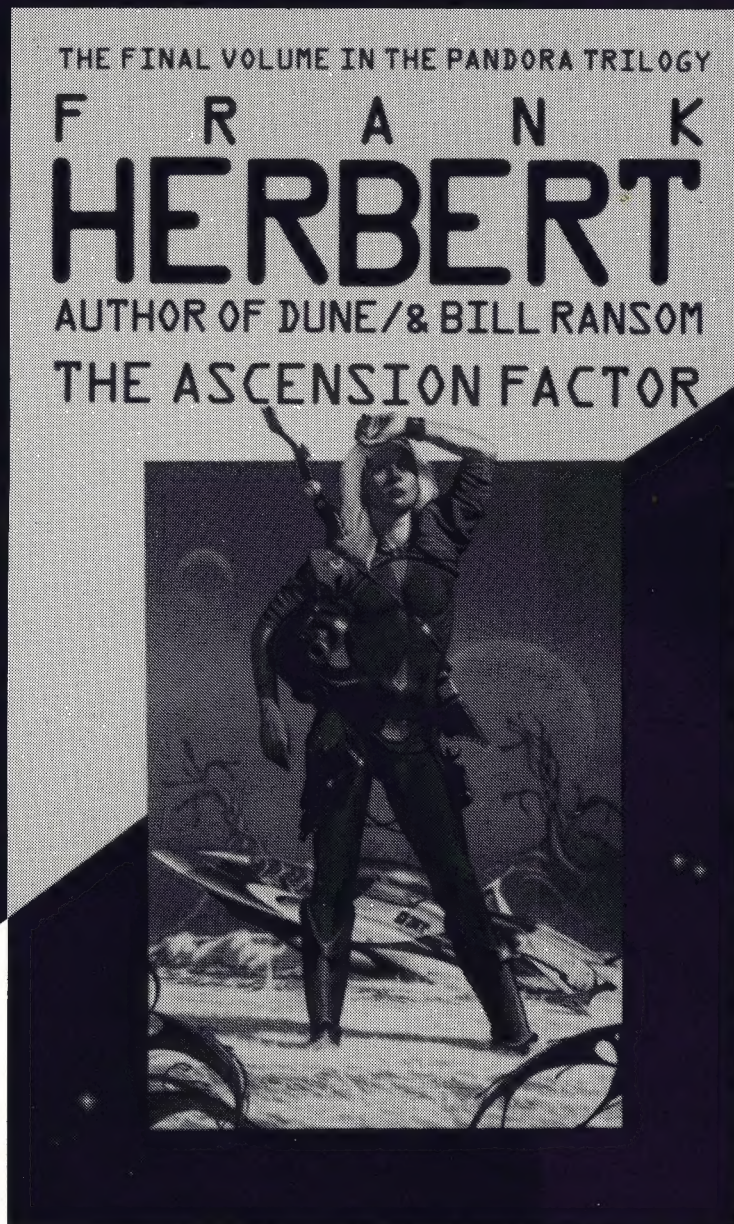
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# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 34

March/April 1990

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# Interface

## David Pringle

Here's our second "All New-Star Issue," showcasing the work of seven up-and-coming writers. Five have appeared in these pages before, with just one story apiece. Two are brand new. Along with our other discoveries of the past year or so – **Stuart Falconer**, **Andrew Ferguson**, **Sharon M. Hall**, **Lyle Hopwood**, **William King**, **Ian Lee**, **Jamil Nasir**, **Marianne Puxley** and **Sylvia Siddall** – and along with those we'll be introducing in the next few issues, they demonstrate that there is no lack of new talent in science fiction and fantasy.

Our "Big Sellers" essay this time, on Anne McCaffrey, is also by a relative newcomer, book-reviewer **Wendy Bradley**; and we're pleased to be able to bring you a major interview with one of the best American writers to have emerged in the past seven years, the remarkable **Lucius Shepard**. Another feature which makes this issue special is the fact that it is entirely illustrated by one artist – **Ian Miller**. Of course, Ian is no newcomer: he was our Art Editor for a couple of years in the early 1980s, and he was already one of Britain's most highly regarded fantasy artists before this magazine was born. So he was a natural choice for our first "single-artist" issue. We hope there will be other such issues in the near future, illustrated by other major talents.

### A WORLDCON IN HOLLAND

Continental Europe is very much in the news as I write – it seems we're entering a whole new political age with the dawn of the 1990s (perhaps *IZ* should become the first "Euro" sf magazine?). As I mentioned last time, this year's World Science Fiction Convention is taking place in Europe (the Netherlands Congress Centre, The Hague, 23rd-27th August 1990). It's called "ConFiction," and it will be the first Worldcon to be held on this side of the Atlantic since 1987. The Guests of Honour are **Joe Haldeman**, **Harry Harrison** and **Wolfgang Jeschke**. If the Brighton convention in '87 is anything to go by, this will be a large and exciting event, with scores of well-known writers, artists and publishers in attendance. The bulk of attendees will be ordinary science-fiction readers, however; if you can afford the costs, you could be one of them. Why not make it part of your summer holiday this year (as I intend to do)?

Apart from anything else, it will pre-

sent a rare opportunity for British and European sf readers to influence the results of the **Hugo Awards**. All convention members are entitled to vote for the Hugos, even those who do not actually attend but merely take out "supporting" memberships. Full attending membership now costs £55 (children under fourteen just £9). Supporting membership is £16. Please note that you must register before 15th July – preferably sooner if you wish to receive a Hugo ballot. For memberships or any further details write to ConFiction, PO Box 95370, 2509 CJ The Hague, Netherlands.

### MORE AND MORE AWARDS

The latest **World Fantasy Award** winners, announced in America towards the end of 1989, are as follows. Best novel: *Koko* by **Peter Straub**. Best novella: "The Skin Trade" by **George R. R. Martin**. Best short fiction: "Winter Solstice, Camelot Station" by **John M. Ford**. Best short-story collection: *Storeys from the Old Hotel* by **Gene Wolfe** and *Angry Candy* by **Harlan Ellison** (tie). Best anthology: *The Year's Best Fantasy, 1st Annual Collection* ed. **Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling**. Best artist: **Edward Gorey**. Life Achievement Award: **Evangelina Walton**.

The slightly more parochial **British Fantasy Awards**, announced at "Fantasycon XIV" in Birmingham in October, went to the following. Best novel: *The Influence* by **Ramsey Campbell**. Best short story: "Fruiting Bodies" by **Brian Lumley**. Best Artist: **Dave Carson**. Best small press: *Dagon* ed. **Carl T. Ford**. Best newcomer: **John Gilbert** (editor of *Fear*). Special award: **R. Chetwynd-Hayes**.

We've also been informed of something called the **Readercon Awards**, special awards for the science-fiction small fry given out at the Boston convention "Noreascon" late last year. Best novel: *Fool on the Hill* by **Matt Ruff**. Best collection: *Co-Orbital Moons* by **Robert Frazier**. Best short work: "The Drowned Man's Reef" by **Charles de Lint**. Best non-fiction: *Strokes* by **John Clute**. Best fiction/poetry magazine: *Interzone* ed. **David Pringle** et al. Plus others, rather too numerous to mention. We're extremely grateful for these small-press awards for Clute's criticism and for *Interzone* itself. Thanks, judges! (These wise people included **Algis Budrys**, **David Hartwell**, **Terri Windling** and **Mark Ziesing**.)

### FAST-CHANGING SCENE

Last issue, I reported that long-time editor **Malcolm Edwards** had left Victor Gollancz Ltd (under the new ownership of Houghton-Mifflin) for Grafton Books (owned by Collins). Now it has been announced that Malcolm's replacement as science-fiction and fantasy editor at Gollancz is **Richard Evans** (lately of *Headline*, previously of *Macdonald Futura*). He will be assisted there by **Faith Brooker**, who has now been promoted to part-time Senior Editor. The new Gollancz team will need to move fast to shore up their list, since it seems that leading authors have been flaking away from the company with some rapidity since Malcolm's departure. **Deborah Beale**, editor of *Century Hutchinson's* "Legend" list, has paid a large sum for **Greg Bear's** next couple of sf novels (admittedly, his is one departure from Gollancz which was already on the cards). More seriously, *Locus* reports that Gollancz author **Michael Moorcock** has sold the hardcover rights in his next fantasy novel to (who else?) Grafton Books; and the *Bookseller* magazine reports that **J. G. Ballard** has just signed a two-book deal with... Collins/Grafton. This last must be a particularly sad blow for Gollancz, since, thanks to *Empire of the Sun*, Ballard was their best-selling fiction author of the 1980s. (More about the forthcoming Ballard books below.)

Malcolm Edwards has not been neglecting the newer authors, though. Also invited onto the Grafton list just recently was *Interzone* author **S. M. Baxter**. He has been offered a two-book contract for his first novel, which is an expansion of the story "Raft" (*IZ* 31), and a collection of his "Xeelee" short stories. Our congratulations to Steve. And another new author who has just sold his first sf novel is **Keith Brooke**, having received an offer from editor **Colin Murray** at Corgi Books. Keith is still only 23, so he's probably the youngest author to publish a debut book in the British sf field for quite some time. Our congratulations to him as well. The list of *Interzone* discoveries who have achieved sales to major book publishers grows ever longer. We're proud.

### TWO NEW BALLARD BOOKS

The forthcoming books by **J. G. Ballard** are to be hardbacked by Collins and paperbacked by Grafton. They are a short-story collection, as yet untitled, which should appear in the autumn of 1990, and a non-sf novel, not yet finished, which will probably be out in 1991. The former will contain all the stories **Jim Ballard** has written for *Interzone* since the magazine's inception in 1982, plus other as-yet uncollected

Continued on page 40





**I**t was Nursie who told me of the Lilim. "They shall inherit the Earth," she said, the night-light silhouetting her profile against the wall, where it joined the shadowplay of my toys. Winding them up, she would let them cavort about the dresser, so that the beating of tiny drums and cymbals, the clatter of tinplate limbs, have always accompanied, in my mind, the memory of her words. "Such pretty automations. Pantalone, Harlequin, Pierrot... How your father spoils you! But beware of her, Peter." And she would pick up thrashing Columbine, image of my inamorata. "Beware of dead girls. Their too-red lips. Their hearts of ice."

Then, stooping, her cheeks hot with shame, she would mutter "O dear, O dear, this really is a man's job," and initiate me into the ways of the Lilim. Like most boys I had, of course, already learned much from the smutty jokes of my schoolmates. But Nursie spoke not to edify; she spoke to warn. "The chambermaid," said Nursie, concluding her biology lesson. "You see too much of her. Unclean, vicious girl! Your father doesn't understand. Don't think of her!" But how could I not think of her, of Titania, my living Columbine? And I asked myself then: Would Nursie tell? (But what was there to tell?) That thin, high-cheek-boned profile haunting the wall, those flinty, folk-dark words, that smell of lavender water as she kissed me goodnight: Nursie chastened my dreams.

Each morning that summer the sun effervesced into my room like a champagne of lemonades. The school holidays were at the meridian, the world mine and Titania's, and Nursie's words like last year's snow. Pulling the curtains, I would look down upon Grosvenor Square, environed by its big pseudo-Georgian buildings. The ruins of the old American mission stood opposite, half-hidden by full-leaved elms; the scented air was murmurous with bees. That summer, my flesh stirred; my voice broke; my heart bloomed. I did not know, then, that my childhood was to end surrendered to the altar of the Lilim.

**O**ne morning it began. Titania was in the kitchen. Her uniform, which my father had designed, was inspired by Tenniel's drawings for Alice: pinafore dress, not in the usual blue, but pink, swirling about the knees; starched apron; candy-striped stockings; and pink satin pumps. ("And how," father would say, greeting her, "is life in Wonderland today?") Cornflakes and a pitcher of milk awaited.

"The land of the Seven Stars – we should go there

again. Today, perhaps?" I asked my pretty friend. "There's lots of work to do."

"I don't think we should, Peter," she chirruped, her bird-like coloratura ("My nightingale," father would say) in contrast to the autistic face. I chewed my cornflakes wretchedly.

"You've got a licence. You shouldn't worry about Nursie."

"Mrs Krepelkova doesn't like dead girls. You know that. Sometimes... sometimes I get scared." Turning to the sink she began to wash the pots and pans, scouring them with a cold agitation. Suddenly she froze, clutching at her stomach.

"Can't father fix that for you?" I had seen these signs before.

"Scared," she said. "It's happening. I feel it inside."

I stirred my cereal into a soggy mess. My appetite had gone. The morning darkened.

"Father says Nursie's just a silly, superstitious old woman."

"The world has become a superstitious place."

"Please, Titania." My wheedling voice cut through her massive self-absorption.

"I'm going shopping later." The words bled out luxuriantly. "If your father says you can come..."

It was always the same, that face: expressionless eyes, green and supernuminous, and the mouth, locked in its pout; the blood-drained cheeks; the elfin chin and pointy ears; the cutesy nose of the Disney princess. And the same too (for she had doll blood, and such are dolls) her meekness, so infinitely accommodating.

Everything, everything was to change.

**M**y father's bedroom was a twilight world of pulled drapes, old books and camphor. The books were everywhere: tomes on engineering and art history; vellum-bound editions of "Second Decadence" writers of the 1990s; chapbooks on toymaking from seventeenth-century Nuremberg; and rarities such as Bishop Wilkins' *Mechanical Magick*. There were paintings, too: among them originals by British twentieth-century artists such as Graham Ovenden and Barry Burman. (My favourite was the Burman canvas called *Judith*, depicting a pubescent girl holding, from a leather-gloved hand, the severed head of Holofernes.) But dominating the room – apart from the great bed that ridiculed my father's consumptive body – were the automata. They hid in the shadows, their kinetic latency like that of coiled, predatory beasts. Here were masterworks from



the Age of Reason: *The Writer and The Musician* by Pierre Jaquet-Droz, purchased from the bankrupt vaults of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Neuchâtel; singing birds by Jean Frederic Leschot; and a magician, a trapeze artist, monkeys, clowns and acrobats by the Maillardets. From a later era my father had collected a bisque-headed *Autoperipatetikos* by Enoch Rice Morrison; the elegantly dressed girls of Gaston Decamps; a Gustav Vichy musical automaton doll; and (creature of night!) a Steiner doll, with its mouthful of shark-like teeth – which earned it the nickname "The Vampire Doll" – intact.

"Titania's going shopping. Can I go too?" Father reached for his spectacles and blinked at me.

"Mrs Krepelkova is worried about you and Titania." I swallowed and dug my hands deep into my pockets. He chuckled hoarsely. "She thinks I am too liberal." Silence. The invalid tray was burdened with buttered muffins; the curtains swayed gently in the summer breeze. "Peter, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"An engineer, like you. A famous engineer."

"No. You mustn't say that. Not any more. The days of the toymakers are over. Mrs Krepelkova: she's the spirit of these times." At the periphery of my hearing a Mayday sounded. The grown world was hijacking my life.

"But Titania's not Lilim," I blurted. My father seemed quietly shocked.

"What stories has Mrs Krepelkova been telling you? Stories of witches and succubi and golems? I swear that woman's brain is full of nonsense. The nonsense of cheap newspapers and cheaper politicians! There are no Lilim, Peter. You're an intelligent boy: you mustn't believe all you hear." He wheezed like a punctured concertina. "Mrs Krepelkova is a good woman. At heart. But we must be careful. Next time you come home from the country bring someone with you. I know you like Titania, but you must make other friends too. For her sake."

"When I was little we had lots of dolls. It never seemed to matter then."

"Life was different then," said my father. Unbidden, the memories came: our home filled with the rich patrons of my father's skills; the marvellous automata that waited on our table; my mother, laughing at some after-dinner joke, her cheek even then hectic with the mutant tubercle bacillus that was to savage the Europe of that *belle époque*. "The invisible worm," he sighed, taking off his glasses, his head sinking into linen and down. "It is best to think of happier times: like the day I was discovered by the Comité Colbert..." His eyelids fluttered, straining at wakefulness. "I had just graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology. They liked my English *hauteur*; the dandyism I had adopted ever since reading the nineties' writers as a boy. France then was the deluxe marketplace of the world. It's like yesterday..." His eyelids closed; his voice became a whisper. "In Paris I freelanced for Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Dior and Chanel. Later I worked for Boucheron and Schiaparelli. By the time I had met your mother and moved back to London I was the finest quantum engineer in Europe. Automata! They were the most coveted of luxury goods. And Europe monopolized the luxury market with its *L'Art de Vivre*. But quantum electronics

has many problems..." His eyes snapped open. "The chief of which is—" He pulled himself upright. "Really Peter, I've told you enough times!"

"Quantum indeterminacy," I said, rote fashion. "The imprecise behaviour of sub-atomic particles."

"Tachyons, leptons, hadrons, gluons, quarks – Mavericks! Hooligans! They were my ruin."

"The crash," I said. "I thought it was the crash that ruined you."

"Our troubles came after Black Monday. The crash was just the beginning. To compete with the Pacific Rim we delved deeper and deeper into the structure of matter to make more wonderful, more extraordinary toys." He passed his hand across his face. "The invisible worm! It was right that we fell. Ours was an *esthétique du mal*. We shaped life to satisfy our vanities; life has called us to book. When you engineer at the quantum level, Peter, at the level of essence, style blurs into soul. And God will not be shaped..."

There was a knock at the door. Nursie entered, in her hands, a steaming bowl of camphor. "Time for your inhalant, sir." She set the bowl down. "Tsk! Has that girl not taken away your breakfast things yet?" And she picked at the bedspread, holding up to the light a wispy thread of lace. "Pink lace, pink ribbons, pink stockings. A pink girl. Pink! Pink! Pink to her praline heart!" She went to remove the muffins and tea pot, but father brushed away her hands.

"That will be all, Mrs Krepelkova, thank you." Hurt, she turned to leave.

"Do you want me to wind your automatons, sir?"

"Peter will do it, Nursie. Later. Thank you." She smiled, shyly, her disappointment tempered by having been addressed by her sobriquet. As she left, she mused my hair.

I drew away; she had defamed Titania.

"She says they eat men," I said, after Nursie had gone, wanting her discredited; banished. "That they're poison. That they kill children and put their own in their place." Father laughed, but not altogether dismissively; he was too aware of what underlay those penny-dreadful tales used to explain the ascendancy of the dolls.

"Reality," he said. "They say it is hard to bear. You mustn't be too hard on her. She's frightened. And frightened people say foolish things." He sighed. "And why shouldn't she fear? We have all been seduced, and the world sickens, gravid with our half-mechanical heirs. No more talk of nanoengineering, Peter. Everyone blames us now, the toymakers. I wouldn't have them blame you too." He leaned over the bed to where Nursie had placed her aromatic offering and breathed deep.

"Titania will be leaving soon. Can I go with her? Please?"

"When I made her I was at the height of my powers. She was my best." Red-eyed and perspiring, he reviewed his automata. "Wind them for me Peter." My hands dipped into wet, freshly lubricated motors, tightening their sprung lives. "Titania's a good girl. She would never harm you. Never."

"Then I can go?"

The automata were waking: a monkey costumed like an eighteenth-century fop took a pinch of snuff; a conjuror sawed at a naked girl; the Steiner doll fell to the floor and wriggled, and squirmed, and squealed;



someone – something – played the *Marseillaise*; and birds began to sing. Soon, that cast of feckless playthings was rioting about my father's bed like a mob before palace gates.

"Their day has come," said father. "Yes, you can go. This time."

The Bentley shouldered its way through the backstreets of Mayfair. Titania drove. Peeking over the wheel, and with lethal abandon, she swung the car into Bond Street. At thirteen (Titania had always been thirteen) her motor-neuron skills often seemed no more accomplished than those of a child; and though in that ghost town vehicular manslaughter was an unlikely prospect, I checked the rear-view mirror for dead bodies and the unlikelier police. The street was empty (during the day the streets were always empty), the receding images of boarded-up windows – Cartier and Tiffany, Ebel and Rolex – a glittering slipstream of demise. Now those showrooms displayed only the spray-canned symbol of the Human Front – a winged double helix – and graffiti that shouted "England For The Organic," "Proud To Be Human" and "Hospitalization Now!"

Such was the agitprop of the Neverlanders: Proles, Yahoos, Morlocks living within the fairy ring of interdiction that was the M25, who, with the setting sun – bitterness confounding their terror – would travel the disused tube lines to emerge in the Ends, West and East, to revenge themselves on the dolls. They remembered, perhaps, one Saturday night party long ago, when a pair of red, red lips had foreclosed their lives; a daughter or sister who had one day metamorphosed into an inhuman, heartbreaking beauty. Not for them the safety of the English shires where money men telecommuted to and from the world, but the lonely conurbations of Surrey and Essex, Middlesex and Kent: reservations the infected were forbidden to leave for fear the recombinant would claim humanity.

At Fortnum's we bought some corned beef and cabbage (the store was run by an old Ukrainian couple, condemned, like my father, to remain in town), and then set off on the classified leg of our tour, our antique motorcar thundering down Shaftesbury Avenue, Holborn, Cheapside, deep into the City. At St Paul's we noticed a few technicians lowering themselves into manholes to massage the trapped nerve of some pampered AI. They noticed us, too; or rather, they noticed Titania, for they suddenly began gesticulating, scurrying into the depths.

"What are they frightened of?" I said. "Dolls only come out at night." Titania, gay as a bird, laughed without irony.

On reaching Whitechapel we pulled into Brick Lane, parking beneath a Cyrillic logo reading LADA. The logo belonged to a warehouse, which – like the derelict "Borsch 'n' Vodka" fast-food outlets nearby – was a legacy from the years when a Bengali enclave had been ceded to Russian migrant workers. Lured by hard currency to buttress Western Europe's declining

birth-rate – the fashion then being to consort with the artificial – "Slav" had, for a time, replaced "Paki" as the taunt of England's bigots. Until, that is, men learned to say "Lilim."

We entered the warehouse by a side door. Light filtered through the corrugated roof, falling aslant over exhausts, engine parts and a samovar. In one corner, where rust had eaten away the trap once used for deliveries to the Seven Stars, the light tripped, fell, and was entombed. We descended the staircase, Titania's cat's-eyes burning green as, sure-footed, she led me into the cellar's swarthy midst. Though blind, I knew a multitude of candles, like stalagmites in an enchanted grotto, rose from the surrounding debris. I heard the sweep of Titania's hand; the candles burst alight, scattering our shadows; and the familiar beer barrels and wine racks, the pool table and slot machines, were revealed to us like the treasures of an Egyptian tomb.

The old pub sign, which we had repainted, hung from a wall. A woman dressed in scarlet, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of seven stars, gazed down upon us, green eyed and beautiful.

"Our flag," I said, saluting her.

"Our planet," said Titania. "I always feel safe here. At least, I feel safe with you." She brushed a cobweb from Our Lady's feet. "What did your father say to you this morning?"

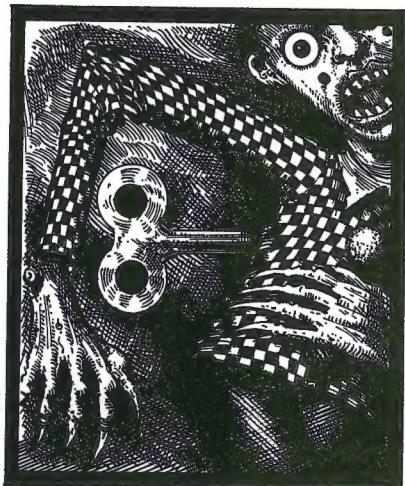
"Nothing," I said, and picked up a can of paint, eager to change the subject. "Let's get started. This is going to be our world."

We were painting a fresco depicting the creation of the dolls, their glorious lives, their fall. The narrative began with an allegory of Europa at the height of her power, showering

joaillerie, objets and couture upon her children. Europe, a luxury-goods conglomerate, had become an Empire of Style. Manufacture had been consigned to the Americas and the Pacific Rim. "Live?" I had scrawled above Europa's head, "Our servants will do that for us..." The following panels were homages to the ultimate *de luxe* status symbols, the automata, in whom the second millenium's *nouveau riche* had found – their sensibilities fashioned by that revival of *Decadence* characterizing those times – friends, loves: artificial ideals for artificial lives. Assembled by microrobots, atom by atom, each doll rose from her vat like a clockwork Venus rising from a chemical sea. The rubric quoted Christian Blanckaert, managing director of the Comité Colbert: "Luxury is for France what electronics is for Japan..." The last paintings concerned Europe's decline: Europa swooning, in economic disarray, forsaken by Taste, raped by Third World technobandits, and witnessing the outbreak of the doll-plague, helpless.

I approached the half-finished portrait of my father. "And how shall we entitle this?" I asked. "Sentenced to live among dolls? Allowed only a yearly visit from his son?" But Titania sat down upon a legless pinball machine, despondent.

"This is just a holiday, Peter. This can never be my





world. To them, I'll always be the Thing from Outer Space." She drew a long red fingernail across the wall, setting my teeth on edge, and incising into the plaster the outline of a heart. "They're right. I'm a dead girl. You shouldn't see so much of me." A trace of coyness had infiltrated her musical-box tones. On one side of the heart she drew a T, on the other, a P; then, momentarily wrinkling her nose, scored the heart with a Cupid's arrow. The ensuing smile, dislocated from the rest of her imperturbable face, twisted at my entrails. "But you're my only friend. What would I do without you? A dead girl needs a friend."

Only recently, after I had returned from the north, had I realized how pretty she was. So delicate, so pale. Our little chambermaid, for years a mere playmate, had had me tossing sleepless in my bed through all the long hot nights of that summer.

"I like —" I said, my throat tightening. "I like dead girls." Her smile rippled across her face like irrepressible laughter at a funeral. "Don't worry about father. He says the Lilim don't exist."

"No," she said, giggling joylessly. "We dolls believe in nothing. Have nothing. Do nothing. We don't exist. I wish —" As if hearing a barked command, her face assumed its customary autism. "Light," she said curtly, "more light." The candles blazed, their light turning green, so we seemed in an undersea cave, immersed beneath a canopy of seaweed. "A doll needs something to believe in. Just the same as people like Mrs Krepelkova. We need an explanation." A tear dribbled down her glassy cheek. I had not known a dead girl could cry. "People say that I am Lilim. Why shouldn't I be Lilim? Why not? They seem to want it so much."

I knelt in front of her, burying my head in her lap. "Don't talk like that. Don't take any notice of people like Mrs Krepelkova." Her hand, white and inhumanly cool, touched my brow, razorblade nails pricking my flesh.

"I would never hurt you. You do know that, don't you, Peter?" She stroked my hair. "Do you remember, years ago, when your father decanted me and brought me home? How beautiful your mother was. I so liked her. If only life could be like that again."

"We'll make it so. We will. Believe me. We'll find some way." I held her hands and looked up into that tear-stained face. Her perfection was unearthly. I felt the coolness of her thighs beneath the thin cotton frock, the articulation of her ball-jointed knees.

"I shouldn't mind," I whispered, "if you were Lilim." The candles guttered in a sudden draught, and the room darkened. "We could — you could —" A spume of saliva hung from her lovely plump lips. "Make the dolls come back — like before — a world of dolls —" The draught became a wind. Her lips parted and she grew saucer-eyed. Spittle dripped onto her chin. The wind blew through me, a divine mistral, turning me to stone. Still kneeling, I clutched white-knuckled at her skirts, petrified by her cold beauty. Her hair, black and opulent, lashed about her face, now like a malefic cherub's; and her eyes shone like green ice. The wind howled, and the ice was in me.

"No!" she shouted, "I won't, I won't!" The wind died, sighing with exasperation. Her tongue, darting lizard-like across her lips, licked away a lather of white froth.

I moaned.

"Don't ask me again. Don't tempt me!" She was clutching at her stomach. "I feel it there. In my clockwork. The poison." She pulled from her pocket a large brass key. "Here," she said. "Like this. This is better. I can take you back. Back to how things used to be." The key was about six inches long with a butterfly handle and a tip of uncut emerald. Again, the wind gusted, threatening a storm.

"That's father's key."

"He doesn't use it any more. He's too ill. He doesn't miss it."

"I'm not supposed to touch it."

Titania placed the key in my hand.

"Don't be frightened," she said, and hoisted her frock above her waist, displaying her white belly. The umbilicus, dimpling the satin hemisphere, dark and deep, exerted its allure. Titania closed her eyes, waiting. "Please, Peter," she said, "make the poison go away."

I inserted the key.

"Careful." She flinched. Fumbling, I pressed the key home and felt it engage. She drew her breath in sharply. I began to turn. "Slowly," she said, "slowly." Deep within her, a hiss and spit: mathematical monsters stirred. She leaned back, lounging across the pinball machine, her midnight tresses trailing in the dust. The key grew more difficult to turn. I hesitated, fearful something might break. "A little more," she said, "just a little more." Using both hands I forced the key a final one hundred and eighty degrees. She shivered, screaming in an impossible soprano. The pinball machine lit up; bottles smashed against the walls; the candles exploded like magnesium flares.

The wind that had been waiting impatiently off-stage hurricanoed through the cellar. It whirled about me, a private storm, ignoring all else. I joined its dance. Lifted off my feet, and clinging to the key like an anchored kite, I spun in its centrifuge. The cellar was a blur of streaked candle flame; below, her belly, a white expanse, a salt-seared tundra, drew me to its mine shaft of night. The umbilicus had grown huge, a black hole sucking me into another universe. I fell into its velvet maw.

Through a dark tunnel dimly lit with blood-red alphanumerics I tumbled in free fall. The tunnel stretched to an infinite perspective; and as I fell a jungle rhythm shuddered through its walls. I was buffeted by waves of turbulence; but I felt no terror; my heart raced benignly with the frisson of a rollercoaster ride. Blood mixed with crystal, crystal with vermeil, amber, glazing into a salmon pink. The tunnel had become a pink glassy membrane. The jungle pulse receded; the membrane ruptured. I smelt grass; felt sunlight on my face; heard the chatter of voices. I opened my eyes.

I was in Grosvenor Square, playing with Mama. About us, the Beautiful People — movie stars, couturiers, artists — scowled at the encircling paparazzi. I was eating an ice-cream; father was talking with friends. Our automata, Treacle, Tinsel, and the newly-created Titania, danced quadrilles with some of our guests. Doll boys, in the shapes of Harlequin and Pierrot, Gilles, Scapino, Cassandre and Mezzotinto, poured wine and served cakes. Half awake, half



asleep, I rested on Mama's breast and watched the dancers weave elaborate, stately patterns to the courtly music of some *gamme d'amour*. It was one of father's "Watteau afternoons": a midsummer day's mime of pleasure, a pastoral from a Meissen porcelain granted a little time and space.

Titania danced by. Was I in love, even then, albeit unknowingly? She was Columbine the *soubrette*, dressed in the sweet satins and *rocaille* folds of the infant eighteenth century. She waves to me with her painted fan. There is a clinking of glasses, a buzzing of bees. Time lies sleeping.

"My work now" (my father's voice drifts by) "is to unveil the spiritual physiognomy of matter." And the conversation turns to nanorobots, the latest molecular machines. "Reduced to the size of a molecule, a component will become delinquent; but I am learning to exploit quantum effects, to manipulate Chaos. (A flash bulb ignites.) Indeed, I have now developed assemblers that can manipulate not just atoms, but sub-atomic particles. These automata you see today, commissioned by the Houses of Cartier and Fabergé, have been brought forth from a microphysical realm where mind and matter, dream and reality, co-exist. They are quite *marvellous* toys." And he extends his arms towards Titania and her clan. "Gentlemen, I give you *L'Eve Future*."

Above the applause, a clap of thunder. It begins to rain.

I do not remember this.

It is raining milk.

And Treacle, Tinsel and Titania – fashion accessories we did not credit with life – bedraggled hair pearly with raindrops, dresses wet and sticky, are standing with their mouths agape like newly-hatched chicks; standing like totems of ecstasy.

Titania?

The guests run for cover as the storm bursts overhead; but the white glutinous rain is drowning London. The flood carries me from Mama's arms, bears me forward on an implacable tide, towards Titania and those red, red lips that are like a giant neon-splashed motorway hoarding advertising the bloodiest of lipsticks.

"No!" Titania cries. "Not you, not you!"

I woke, sweating. The cellar was becalmed. Titania was rearranging her clothes.

"It wasn't like that," I said, tremblingly.

"I know," she said. "I pollute even the past."

"No," I said. "It's all right. Really."

She pressed her hand to her stomach. "It's there. You saw it. The malignancy."

I got up, chewing my lip, embarrassed. "I said it's all right. It doesn't matter. In fact –"

Titania doubled over, her chalk-white features rearranging themselves into a mask of pain.

"Please leave me," she said. "I'll be better in a while. I need to be alone." I hesitated. "Leave me, Peter."

With misgiving, I returned to the street, took the fold-up bike from the boot of the Bentley, and cycled home; but not before eliciting a promise that she

would follow in the car later when she had composed herself.

I always respected her wishes.

But, of course, she did not return.

"The Lilim," said Nursie, winding my toys, "are everywhere." She pecked me on the cheek, sharp as a macaw.

That evening Nursie had stamped about the house muttering "Where is that girl? Where is that robotnik?" My father sulked, alone, in his room. Now, at my bedside, my smug nursemaid was saying: "I told you. I told your father. But would anyone listen? No. Krepelkova is just a silly old crone." She held a well-thumbed paperback in her lap: *The Doll Problem – Lilith and Her Daughters*. It was the bible of the Human Front.

"Lilith was Adam's first love. But she was proud and vain and adulterous..." She opened the book, removing a photograph from its leaves. "Lilith is Satan's consort, Peter. She is Queen of the Succubi.

She comes to men at night so that she may corrupt their children..." She held the photograph before me. It was a portrait of a young girl, an acid-drop blonde in whose pixieish face I recognized the traits of the recombinant: green, hysterical eyes and a sickly white complexion that suggested a diet of junket and sweets. "At first I blamed my son-in-law," said Nursie. "He never told me how it happened. But I don't think he meant to be unfaithful. Dolls have their ways." She studied the snapshot carefully. "You can still see the human part of her. If you look closely. When she was born she was such a lovely child. We had no idea. It's when they're about twelve or thirteen that it happens.

Almost overnight. The eyes turn green. Luminous green. And the face: it isn't a human face any more. It becomes," and she paused, her brow creasing, "beautiful. But it is a beauty that is horrible in a child. Poor Anna, she was a daughter of Lilith, and they made her wear the green star of the Lilim. Then the lactomania began. And they took her away. To the Hospitals. My baby's baby..."

I went to sleep, clasping, with anxious hands, Titania's key beneath my pillow.

The next day I cycled back to Brick Lane. The Bentley was still parked outside the warehouse. "Titania!" I called. But the warehouse was empty. I descended into the world of the Seven Stars, my pocket-torch flushing out the shadows.

She had gone. I breathed a deep lungful of fetid air and went to ascend the stairs. A goblet of water broke at my feet; I jumped, swinging the torch around. Hanging from the ceiling in what seemed a sac of viscous bronze was the foetal-crouched shape of a woman. She was fleshless; what remained was a raw, quivering jelly suffused with plastics, metals and jewels. I retched, dropped the torch, and ran.

And then I was gunning the Bentley towards Mayfair; towards the rail guns and security cameras that surrounded our house; towards the human world.





**“W**here is she?” asked father. I told him. “There’s nothing we can do,” he said. “Nothing.” He fidgeted with the bedsheets. “I never thought it would happen. Not to her. Not to Titania.”

“Will she die?” I barely dared utter the words.

“The philistines call them dead. Dead girls. A nexus of formal rules. Non-reflective. No, she won’t die. Now she makes her claim on life.” He threw back the sheets and swung his legs onto the floor. “I must go to her.” But a fit of coughing took him and he collapsed in a tangle of bedclothes. “Those Cartier and Fabergé dolls,” he said, gaining his breath. “I thought I was making elegant, eighteenth-century ladies, spirits of gentleness and grace.” He pointed to the foothills of books surrounding his bed. “The Decadents! Writers and artists who filled my boyhood dreams with chimeras, vampires and sphinxes. Ah, the perversity of childhood... I tried, Peter. I tried to deny that darkness, programming my atomic machines to pluck angels from pandemonium. But atomic objects can be understood only in terms of their interaction with the observer. When we speak of the subquantum world, we speak of ourselves.”

Something terrible snarled in the undergrowth of my mind and readied itself to pounce. I dared it.

“Did you put the poison in Titania?”

“I always blamed others,” he sputtered, the words rushing out. “I said it was some bug introduced into their programmes by our competitors in the Far East. But the virus was mine. Between the lines of Titania’s programme, within its infinitely complex, fractal text, lurk my dark childhood dreams. Now that sub-text emerges, the poison seeps...” He began to cough.

“I’ll go. I’ll bring her back.”

“No.” He drew himself up. “I’ll go in the morning. It’s getting dark.” The sun, red and bloated, was sinking over Grosvenor Square. The jewelled eyes of my father’s automata glistened. He placed his hand on my shoulder. “She can’t come home, Peter. Understand that. Her power... it is enormous. I grew her from the quantum field, the essence of all forms. In her, space and time, mind and matter, are enfolded by... by what? A reality I cannot grasp. She is unconstrained by physical laws, at one with the essential nature of things. She is Creation.” He looked out of the window, his face flushing in the rays of the dying sun. “But I have poisoned creation. I gave her life, Peter; I must take it. Tomorrow, before she is reborn.” He sighed. “Can anyone explain this need to create beauty?”

At the top of the house was Titania’s room. I sat at her vanity table, my face pressed into the petticoats of an Alice dress. Among the powder-puffs and paintsticks, old copies of *Vogue* lay open. Pictures of salon dolls, some of which – cross-specie amalgams and multi-limbed cephalopods – I had never seen before, stared up at me, curious and reproachful. “Where is our sister?” they seemed to say.

I was ashamed. I had been a fool to run away from the *Seven Stars*; ten times the fool to have told father. But father was too sick to rise from his bed. Titania, for the moment, was safe.

I thought of the evacuation, when, along with other boys at King’s Cross, I had jeered a little girl who had passed by wearing the green star of the recombinant.

On the train we talked of girls who flew through the night, who crept into your room, your bed, the succubi who infected your germ cells. Soon, our dormitory was adorned with their photographs; photographs from the *Sun* and *News of the World*; photographs of lovely, half-human bodies on the dissecting tables of the “Dolls’ Hospitals.” Despicable England, I had shared your hypocrisy, desiring what I condemned. No more. That summer I had loved a doll; and, like a girl from the wrong side of town, that doll had made me a rebel. My allegiance, now, was to Titania and her kind. The plague was not in them, but in us.

**F**or several nights, lying sleepless in the midnight heat, I waited. And then she came. She stood at the foot of my bed, a child dressed in scarlet; above her head, a crown of seven stars.

“You don’t have to come, you know.”

“I love you,” I said.

And I floated into the air as, taking my hand, she led me through the open window and into the night.

The last thing I saw of my old life was Nursie’s head framed in my bedroom window. She was calling to me, pleading with me to come back. I heard the sweep of Titania’s hand; and Nursie disappeared.

“I should have turned her into a frog,” said Titania, succinctly.

Far below, London was spangled with bonfires where Never-Never Kids ransacked the barren heartland of their prison. It was Saturday night: partytime of the damned. Drones hovered above the rooftops. The military observed; it did not intervene. London had been relinquished; only those who attempted to pass beyond the interdiction were recognized as a threat. Wealthy families – like ours – might obtain waivers. But the Neverlanders were a dispossessed people: Russians and Czechs, Poles and Transylvanians: outcasts for whom only the anthropocentric jingoism of the Human Front seemed to offer hope. My father, and others in the luxury trade thought to be infected, had been ordered to remain in town; the Neverlanders had simply had no place else to go. Now they lived within the shadows of the watchtowers and the energy-screen, in the shantytowns of London’s periphery; and there they would stay until the plague had run its course, their children doomed to metamorphose into dolls; dolls who would live but a handful of years; dolls who would never grow up. But Saturday night was partytime, when anger, despair or the siren call of the automata would lure the Neverlanders from their suburban ruins and into London’s mean and haunted heart to riot in a dance of death.

We passed over St Paul’s, my pyjamas flapping against me like a tropical flying suit. I clung to Titania’s back as we gained height to clear the dome, and I heard her silk gown tear between my fingers at the violence of our ascent. Then we fell in descending spirals to the night-town streets of the East End.

**I**nside the warehouse a fluorescent sign proclaimed *Seven Stars*, adding, in smaller letters, *Milk Bar*. Before the stairwell stood a life-sized toy soldier.

“A doll boy,” I said. “I thought they were extinct...”

“Almost,” said Titania. “But then they were never really chic.”



The boy automaton lowered his rifle and moved aside. From the cellar came the hard-edged sounds of Peter Gunn. We descended.

"How –"

"Magic, Peter. Doll magic."

The cellar had been refurbished with bar, dance floor and stage. Peter Gunn growled its welcome. Spewing music roll, a Pianola provided the music's bass line; nearby, a young man in the fetishistic clothes of a Neverlander (doublet, hose, cod-piece, riding-boots) wrung the theme from a rusted sax while a girl trance-danced before him.

"Our song," I shouted.

"Our planet," shouted Titania. "Or at least it will be soon. Do you remember when we first discovered this place? The forbidden journeys! But nothing is forbidden now."

What was different about Titania? Some things were obvious: the halo of stars; the new litheness in her step; the sophistication of her larynx. But there was more. I thought of what father had said about his childhood obsessions, his dreams of the chimera, vampire and sphinx. Titania had risen from the atelier of those dreams. Her dark inheritance was also mine. She had become a sister, a shadowself. She was the family secret, the unacknowledged scion, who, for years bricked up in a secret room, had broken free to seek revenge.

A congregation of Never-Never Kids was watching the floor show: the boys confused, drained, exhausted; the girls overwound with a tensility that threatened at any moment to snap.

"These boys!" Titania gestured dismissively. "Pure narcotrash. Nympholepts! The Neverland is full of them. They canoe through the tunnels of the District Line and surface at Whitechapel. And what do they come for? Not to kill, no, not these ones. Hopeless addicts, these. No good to me. I want fresh blood to befoul. But they amuse my little waifs..."

The music stopped, and the dancer, taking five, walked over to us. She seemed older than me: Titania's age, perhaps. But the arrested adolescence that is common to the recombinant made it impossible to judge. Radically microdressed in the latest tart-couture, her meat-red leotard – woven from the live tissue-culture fabric called "Skin II" – resembled the flayed torso of a Sadeian heroine.

"Dance with me," said the girl.

"I don't know how," I mumbled.

"Later," said Titania, peremptorily. "Now get Peter a drink." Piqued, the half-doll withdrew to the bar and returned with a glass of lemonade. Titania led me to an empty table.

"Peter," she said, "I am going to make it real. I am going to give them something to believe in."

"The Lilim?"

"A fairy tale, Peter. A nasty fairy tale. But for our persecutors it will become a nightmare made flesh. My girls – I am going to give them a religion. I am going to make them proud of their little green stars. And the Seven Stars shall be their temple..." Titania

took my hand in hers and squeezed it. "Natasha!" The dancing girl joined us. "Natasha, tell Peter what I've taught you." The girl looked at me lazily, dipped a finger in my lemonade, and put it to her raspberry-stained lips. "Later," said Titania.

"Lilith," began the girl, "was banished from Eden. From all the human world. And everybody said she couldn't have babies. Never. She was – she was a dead girl. But there were these angels, see, and they said she could have other ladies' babies. And the angels made her very pretty, and..."

"Tell him about the future, Natasha."

"Yeah, the future." A rivulet of saliva dribbled from the side of her mouth onto her chin, and then, her breasts. "Lilith has given us the future. When I became recombinant my big sister took me to a movie. It was *Pinocchio*. And I thought, if only I could be a real girl. Fecal! I'm Lilim, a daughter of Lilith. One hundred per cent doll! And we're going to drink the world dry. All the tasty geezers! Then they'll be sorry. Yeah!"



The Pianola was chewing on its music roll, and the bass line from Peter Gunn revived. Natasha shook her head, her hair – bleached, with the black roots of her Cartier patent showing through – a paroxysm of peroxide.

"You want to dance now?" asked Natasha, moving onto the floor. The saxophonist drowned my reply.

"Sexual delinquent," said Titania. "Crazy automaton! I try to invest her life with meaning, and what does she do? Dance, dance, dance! That little doll's burning out. It's the lactomania of course..." Again, she squeezed my hand; her voice was earnest. "There's not many of us left. Dolls like me, that is. We must make sure our daughters

succeed us. A world of dolls, that's what you want, isn't it Peter?"

Of course. Take me now, I thought, on the altar of your new church. Let the storm rage. Don't wait. Don't let me reconsider. "Please," I heard her say, "won't you help me?" Her psychic pheromones crackled in my brain like an electromagnetic scent.

I reached into my pyjamas and produced Titania's key. I pushed it across the table.

"Silly boy, that leads to the past. I want to show you the future. *L'Eve Future* they called our series. But I shall be Lilith..." She pulled my hand beneath her skirts. Her pubis was as cool and smooth as marble. "Isn't it just like a doll?" Her laugh was shrill. "Sexless, he wanted us, your priceless Papa. But his subconscious desires made us whores. Virgin whores, forever enflowered!"

An icy draught swept across the cellar. The candles flickered and died. In the darkness, screams. But the music continued, the relentless bass line vibrating through my body, a body ossified by an Arctic wind. "I won't hurt you," she whispered. "I will never hurt you. Help me. Help me find a human womb."

Against a night sky, a crown of stars like a new constellation bobbed, weaved and settled between my thighs. Sharp fingernails fluttered about my groin.



And as I felt the icy touch of lips and tongue draw me into a cold, still landscape, I became that landscape, the foam-flecked years crashing, white and sterile, against my shore. In those waves I saw the Neverland, in whose doorways and alleys the recombinant knelt, feeding on the beguiled. I saw the Neverland convulsed by the doll-plague, its newborn girl-children destined to metamorphose into half-dolls, half-humans, whose imperative was to infect others until the Neverland seethed with recombinant life. And I saw the Neverland die, its denizens reduced to starving packs of girls whose teenage mortality would soon leave London's *cordon sanitaire* a dry husk. Then I saw those who had escaped, the Lilim who claimed other cities, other countries, instructing their sisters in a religion whose longed-for apocalypse was a world usurped, a world of gilded automata. And with no human DNA to pirate I saw that parasitic race, thirst-crazed, hysterical, die in an ecstatic *liebes-tod*, burning on the same pyre as forgotten Man.

Peter Gunn reached its climax. I shuddered. Titania was robbing me of my human future. But she gave, too. In her saliva, ten billion microrobots – her software clones – coursed into my blood and lymph like a school of mermaids. Ten billion little Titanias swam through me, passing through my urethra, seminal ducts, and into my seminiferous tubules, where they melded themselves with my reproductive ware, corrupting my chromosomes with blueprints for dead girls. I would carry her with me all my life, my Columbine, my sweet soubrette; my Titania, queen of the fay; my children would be her children. And I knew then, as I clenched my teeth and eyes, as the saxophone wailed, the table turned, and a glass smashed to the floor, that I too would be a builder of dolls; like my father, I too would be a great engineer! I would complete his work. I would build a world for the chimera, the vampire, the sphinx; a world of childhood perversity; a world of dolls. And as the applause rose from that unseen tribe of doll girls and their vending-machine dates, and as I cried out, I was glad that it had come to this, that my life had been sealed by desire and dedicated to the propagation of the Lilim.



**Richard Calder** is 33 years old and lives in Essex. His first story, "Toxine," appeared as an original piece in *Interzone: The 4th Anthology* (Simon & Schuster, 1989). His second, "Mosquito," appeared in *IZ* 32 and has now been taken for reprinting in *Omni* magazine, sf's highest paying market. He tells us that "The Lilim" is the third and last in his sequence of "automaton" stories, and that he is now intending to strike out in a new thematic direction.

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**E**very city has a place like this. It lies at the back of everywhere else, where long streets lead nowhere both ways. It's mostly night here: there are rags of it left in the alleys even at midday. But it's where you have to earn and chance your living

Voices are circling the darkness, the lips and the hips, the words that bring the brakelights, the face to the windscreen, the open car door. You taste hunger and fear. You don't feel ready but you know you need to sell. No point waiting for that big limo, the clean and friendly face. They never take the trade here, and when they do they aren't real. They touch your skin as if it's shrinkwrap. You see the steel edge of pain slide behind their smile

Stepping to the kerb is like diving into a vat of something cool. You know the way you walk says now and me. The big leather handbag you lifted two days before bumps your side. For no reason, it feels like protection. You hear engine breath and see all the others, names you can place with needs like your own. But now they are nothing but meat, competition. There are streetlights but no stars, and looking up is like falling, like giving way. You wonder if you've

taken too much, or if it's not enough. Next time, you tell yourself, everything will be fine, everything will be immaculate. And you focus on that and imagine that now is that time

A car slows. Your car. You don't doubt for an instant that this is the one. Smile at the window. Already, you're drawing yourself in, clicking on the robot, pulling away from thought. There's short talk of money, but you slide in beside him anyway and you're alone. He's got a hotel room. He wants the whole night. He says things about you, the way you look and smell, taking his hand off the wheel to touch as he drives

The city slides by like coloured rain. You can't stop staring at the child's toy at the bottom of the dash. A thing without much face apart from eyes and floppy little arms with half the fur chewed away. Could be a teddy, a rabbit, a fox. Well-loved, the phrase is. You can't stop staring

**T**he hotel room, pink and baby blue. Trying not to look, you admire as though he made it himself. There's a Swap appliance in the corner. There always is. The rental company logo on the side.



The power line goes to the same marbled socket as the teasmade. Maybe it's a choice, tea or Swap. But he fixes you a real drink from the paybar instead and it's vodka

The glass has a crack in it. Trying not to look, clicking on the robot. There's a plastic snowscene toy on the bedside cabinet. He picks it up and turns it in his hands as he sits easy on the bed. You wonder, although it breaks every rule, about his wife, his kids. He hitches up the knees of his suit trousers so as not to spoil the crease. His legs are quite brown in the gap above his sock. You comment admiringly on his tan with the right kind of smile clicked into place. You finish your drink and he gets you another, and you start to think that maybe this one is kind, this one understands. The whole luggage of hope spills out and you're dragging it around the room with your figure and your smile. And when you sense he's anxious to start you ask What's It To Be and you feel his doubt. There's even a moment when you hope he's not going to want to Swap

But

Let's Swap, he says. It comes out like it's a great, new idea. And that's how you take it: freshly minted for this baby pink and blue room, for this special occasion

He runs his Amex card through the slot on the Swap appliance and you notice how his eyes and his hands are solid sure. There's an awkward wait until the credit beeps through, then you stand with your hands over the two Swap boxes like the contestants in Name That Tune. And you wonder if it's worth repeating that same old joke just as he starts on it anyway. You both start to laugh, and you begin to get the buzz of the Swap

Then the slam of it

And you're in his body

The flood of being inside someone else

You're inside, looking out at your own face and you can feel how the dampness of his excited skin sticks against suit and shirt. His mouth tastes faintly of rancid walnuts and his big hands move lighter and easier than you'd imagined. You stare back at yourself. It's so much clearer than a mirror; you can see the faint smudge of mascara where you must have rubbed your eye. You decide your eyebrows are too thick and the pores too deep and wide. He smiles at you with your lips, out of your eyes. His hands are already exploring the newness of your body, running down and up. Then he pulls you close. And there's no hurry. But you start to do it anyway

When you come with his body into your own it's like the cold dive of stepping to the kerb. And you feel pity for men, just as you feel pity for women. You fall back on the sheets into the smell of his sweat and you gaze at your face across the pillow as the eyes drift shut and he sleeps inside your body for a while. It's hard to imagine the dreams that come to him in your brain, but your face looks sweetly blissful now, asleep, the way you never see it. You look even younger than you are. You think of your sister who died, your mother and the smell of cooking in the Sunday garden. You lean over so gently and kiss your lips with lips of stubble and the eyes blink open and he stares back at you. He stretches and growls and tries to look sexy in his borrowed woman's body as

though what you see and feel matters

But

He gives up and lies restlessly still. The hotel is silent and each car on the dual carriageway outside is a separate noise, a separate identity. The eyes stare wide at the ceiling. You wonder what he wants but you're afraid to ask in the phlegmy growl of your borrowed voice

You're afraid to ask

But he says it anyway

He says it with your lips your voice your throat

He says Hit me

**N**ow that it's out and the need is suddenly huge you realize that the sex before was just a veil to pull over it. You bunch his hands that felt so light before and feel them swing like lead. You can feel it. The power. He wants the taste of metal and salt. You straddle your breasts, jutting your suntanned knees down against the thin arms.

You swing your fists down and you see your face go slack with the pleasure of it. There's an erection bobbing stupidly between your legs and you both come but coming isn't important. You hate yourself so much that it's hard to stop, even when he starts to kick and wriggle beneath you. You hate. You hate everything. You take it out on yourself. He fights you with thin, weak arms. The resistance is only moth wings and you can taste the power and the horror, the salt and the metal until something finally brims over and

You lie back, breathing. There's blood on your knuckles, blood on the bed board. He turns and curses you softly through split lips, saying You Don't Know When To Stop, You Stupid Bitch. And you stare at the lips and the puffing eye and wonder if this time there might be scars. And then, somehow, you both sleep

It's hard to remember the Swap back in the morning. There's just the hot pain of the shower and seeing the Amex card on the cabinet beside the snowscene toy and lifting the card by instinct as you shoulder your handbag. And suddenly you're back in his car and he's offering to drive you anywhere, just anywhere. The well-loved cuddly toy is still staring at you from the bottom of the dash. It's a shock when you look down at your own thin hands and when you try to say where you want to go your mouth feels as though it's filled with sharp stones

The car carries you off. The city is flat in the early light, like a black and white photo on a tin tray

His hands are easy on the wheel. He's a regular guy, talking about his family as he drives. He's even using what sound like their real names just to show that he's not afraid. His wife used to do Personnel and his eldest is called Tina. Tina's ten and dyslexic – the shit they had to take down at the school to convince them she wasn't just stupid. Haley's the other and she's only four. Tina's a fine kid, but Haley's the real looker, almost like that little kid in the *Poltergeist* movies who died. You know, cute. She'll get the boys crazy when she grows tits and an ass, might as well face it. A Dad has to admit his kids are gonna have a sex life

He nods down at the dash. That thing there you're looking at, he says, that cuddly toy, is Bib-Bob. The



famous Bib-Bob. Haley's pride and joy, and even now she's reached four Bib-Bob has to come everywhere. Jesus, she loves that toy, chews it till it's filthy and then screams murder when it goes in the wash

And you're dead right, he grins, this regular guy, Daddy's deep in the dog house for driving off this weekend for a conference with Bib-Bob still in the car

You pick the famous Bib-Bob up. And you smile a crooked smile with your crooked face. And Bib-Bob feels soft and light as something alive. But the man stops smiling as he drives and tells you to Put That Fucking Thing Down. And that's just what you pretend to do as you bend close to dash and slide Bib-Bob into your handbag, down there with the Amex card

He wants to drop you off close to where you need to be. Nothing's too much trouble. But you investigate your face again in the pulldown mirror and touch the puffiness and the scabs. Somehow that makes him angry. He stops the car anywhere and throws you out and drives off. But it doesn't matter. When you dust yourself down, hitch your bag and check where you are, you realize you're nearly there anyway

Ronno's dealing early. He handles the franchise for people like you, people who need some kind of ladder to climb out of the night. And you've got more than enough cash for the score. Ronno hands it over and doesn't ask about your face. He knows; he's seen it all before. Walking back to your big room in the old house that you used to share with Stephanie before Stephanie got busted, feeling the bruises tug at your arms, the score doesn't matter any more. It's often this way. Now that you've got it, tucked beside Bib-Bob in your bag and wrapped in tissue, it looses the pull

You pass a scrap of wasteland filled with tall purple flowers and fairies of dandelion seeds drifting in sunlight. You pause for a moment and there's a click of balance where everything but the light and the flowers is nowhere. It makes you wonder how it all happened. Did you start trading your body because you needed the score...or did you need the score because you were trading? But when you get back to the rotting house and up the stairs and across the loose beam and wedge some fresh newspaper into the broken panes you lie down on the stained mattress

And your fingers hurry with the paper

And it feels as good as ever. As good you could ever imagine

As the loose haze fills out you take Bib-Bob from your bag and hold him to your aching face. Well-loved. He smells of fresh rain and childhood spit. He soothes your pain with soft and tiny arms, giving out some of the love that's been poured into him. And then you dream and Bib-Bob's big as the world and everything is nestled safe within him

**I**t's already late afternoon when you awake. Bib-Bob soaks up the tears on the grubby cushion beside you, smiling with his little stitch mouth, sharing the secret of dreams you can't understand or even remember

There are voices downstairs. You check your face in the broken mirror and wash it in the stale water in the basin. You're starting to look like the Elephant Man. Not caring what they think, you stumble down to join the others. But no one says a word. They've all been there, on the wrong side of a Swap. You get

inside a body that's filled with the wrong juices and you don't stand a chance. There are some smokes around and the atmosphere's good. Tony's on a special high: he's sold one of those odd pictures he does to a guy he met as a pickup. The guy's loaded and says he has talent. He wants him to move in, help with an exhibition. And Judi's Dad's written from Germany. The letter got here somehow, just like magic. And here it is. She holds the crumpled pages to her face and you think of the famous Bib-Bob upstairs in your room, just waiting to be loved

But the dark comes quickly. Before you know, the smokes have all gone and everyone's quiet and thinking about what's to come. There's only one way through the night, and that leads to the back of somewhere else, a street that goes nowhere both ways

You put on the robot clothes, and frown at your face and do what you can with what makeup you've got, which isn't a great deal. Everyone leaves alone and takes their own way to the place, through their own dreads and possibilities. There's no one to talk to now that everyone is just meat, the competition

The black air hurts like a toothache. You've got Bib-Bob in your bag and somehow just thinking about him makes you want to cry

But you keep your face as smooth and even as the puffiness allows and hang back in the shadows, letting the night kick into gear

The meat walks the kerb, cooing to the brakelights, the opening doors. You know there's no big limo, no clean and friendly face. The pickups are as much meat as you are, their skin is shrinkwrap, the blade slides behind their smile. So you step into the light and try to move your body like it's something fresh and real and the famous Bib-Bob's at your side in the bag you lifted three days before and Bib-Bob feels like some kind of protection. Already, you're longing for the score and you know the night won't end until you get it

The kerb is a cool dive. The streetlights spark and shine. Your face in the windows as the brakelights whisper. You try to smile and pout but your skin feels dead. Your tongue searches your cheek and it's like puffy mushrooms. You see what they see reflected in the glass and the tyres scream the wet road as they pull away. You're the Elephant Man. In the makeup of a clown

Then one does slow and the face inside sees your face and smiles. He knows he understands. The brakelights grin, the car door opens. And you realize that he likes what he sees and he wants to do more, that he wants the taste of salt and metal. So you stumble back into the darkness and run down the street that leads both ways nowhere

There's a taxi. For Hire. The driver slows and says Jesus I Nearly Ran You Down but he can't see you in the dark and he takes you as if you're a normal fare. But when you climb out at the hotel the light catches your face and he screws his up in disgust like a paper bag. You throw the money at him and wonder where he gets all that righteous anger from, pimping lifts here in the city

There's music in the foyer like peach ice cream. Men buried in deep chairs, deep in drink and newspapers. You've pulled a scarf from under Bib-Bob in your bag and you've got it around your face like a Russian peasant



You take a risk and go straight to the desk. The clerk's got his nose buried in a computer screen and you move so quietly on your heels that he doesn't hear you. The carpet is soft as Bib-Bob. You scan the pigeonholes behind and find the room number from last night. He must be out; the key is on its hook. You know where he'll be, looking for someone like you who isn't

You clear your throat and the clerk looks up without looking. And you ask for the key and he simply gives it you. You take the lift where the ice cream music pours in loud and creamy waterfalls. No one else gets in. You're glad it's just you and Bib-Bob, just you and him alone

Nothing about this is easy. If it wasn't for Bib-Bob at your side you'd turn and run. Walking the corridor is another cold dive and the key barely fits, like it's only just been made

The room. Looks bigger. The maid has wiped the blood off the headboard. The bed looks as if it's never been slept in, let alone

The Swap appliance. The lead to the marbled socket that also feeds the teasmade. It's tea or Swap and there's no competition. You take Bib-Bob out and the Amex card as well. Bib-Bob smells like Christmas and childhood. The Amex smells like the polished floor of a bank just after opening. You hug Bib-Bob tight. You gaze at him. He smiles back with his well-loved eyes, with his half-unstitched mouth. Bib-Bob soaks up all the world's tears and hurt. He's nothing but love

The Swap appliance. A little LCD you hadn't noticed before says Ready To Enter. You run the Amex through the slot and a credit bleep comes quickly. You kiss Bib-Bob's little face and you sit him on the Swap box facing you. He falls off it. You kiss him and sit him down again. And then you stand with your hand over the other box, like it's Name That Tune but you're the only contestant, unless you count Bib-Bob

And you wait for the buzz

And you smile at Bib-Bob

And you wait for the slam

**A**nd he comes back to his room a couple of hours later with someone else like you that he didn't even have to buy. But there's a body on the floor and the whole scene's blown. The thing is breathing and the eyes are wide but there's nothing inside. The pickup has hysterics. He slaps her around a bit to make her stop then he sends her away with enough money

He rings the Company. He's a Company man. They have shares in this hotel. And it's a good Company

And he's a good employee

And it could happen to anyone

So they take the body to a hospital, and the Company has shares in that too. They hook up the life supports for a while before they turn them off again. The thing is just lifeless junk. The sort that gets cleaned out of the gutter every day

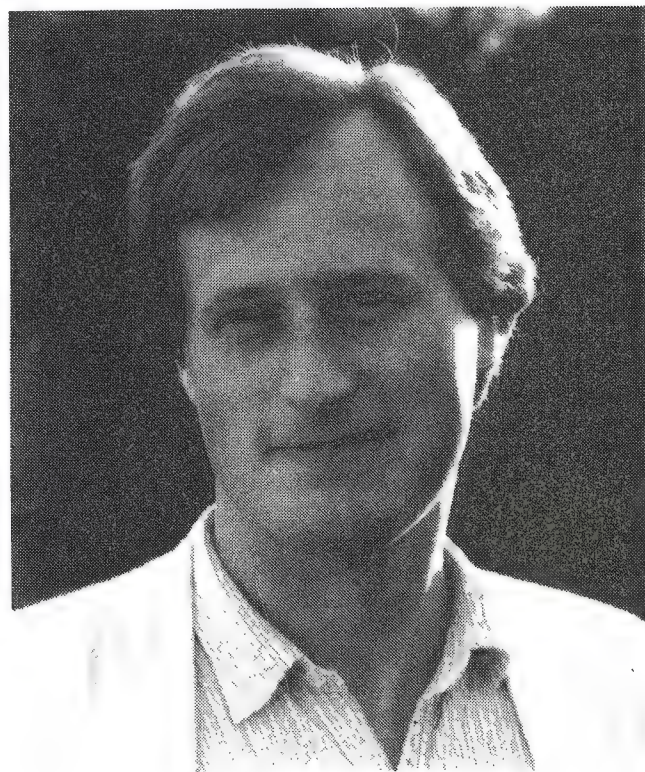
And

Long before that, the conference has ended and he's back at home, parking in the twilight drive amid the Scots pines and the brown rooftops where swallows wheel. The lights are in the windows and children are in his arms. He's every hero. He's the voyager returning home from the quest. He's Ulysses. He's

Frodo Baggins. He's Parsifal. And the kitchen smells of burnt toast and cinnamon. He kisses his wife as though she's freshly baked from the oven and What Do We Have Here In These Cases. Goodies for you and you and you. Tina and Haley clap and yell at jigsaws and snowscene balls and his wife preens You Shouldn't Have with a microdot bottle of exorbitant perfume. And lookée what we have here at the bottom of the case. The famous Bib-Bob himself

Haley's in tears with her arms out gimme-gimme tight to have the famous Bib-Bob even though she's getting a little old and had forgotten all about him whilst Daddy was away. There's snot on her upper lip and she wipes it away with Bib-Bob's ear. Then she swings him by the leg and does a Bib-Bob's-come-home war dance all around downstairs. She slams Bib-Bob on the dining room table and rattles him along the bannister rails

Then Haley sits down in the warm laughter of the kitchen. She sniffs Bib-Bob, pressing him to her face and wondering why he smells of nothing more than old sheets. Wondering why he feels so loose and ugly. Bib-Bob used to be famous, great and wise. Bib-Bob used to stand astride the world. Bib-Bob's been away and Bib-Bob's come home. But nothing ever stays quite the same. Wrinkling her pretty nose, turning her eyes wide and bright to the swirling snowscene, she lets Bib-Bob fall to the floor



**Ian R. MacLeod's** previous contribution to this magazine was "Through" (IZ 30). He is in his early thirties and lives in the West Midlands with his lawyer wife. Although he has sold no stories elsewhere as yet, he has been taken on by an American agency and hopes to crack the transatlantic market soon.



# AN ARTIFICIAL Life



**I**t was on an uncomfortable afternoon in Mexico City that I first encountered Professor Gee in person, at the International Conference on Artificial Intelligence.

Artificial Life was my area of specialization in those days, biological modelling. I had just perfected my artificial cat, which was a considerable achievement, though my university was not sufficiently impressed. The artificial cat was perfectly capable of catching mice but apparently this talent was of little commercial value, and that was what counted most with the funding committees. Times being what they are, and knowledge not being valued much in its own right but only for the income it can generate, I knew I would have to find an industrial or military use for the visuo-motor coordinator that was the secret of the cat's success. There were already a number of proposals on my desk, including an autonomous drain cleaner, and I could feel a black depression descending on my thought processes.

The conference at least got me away from such concerns for a while. That morning I presented a paper on my recent work, after which I got into a running argument with the philosopher, Loosheim, who thinks Artificial Intelligence is a contradiction in terms and that my biological models are travesties of nature. He actually said he didn't think I could model an amoeba.

We carried on our argument throughout lunch and into the seminar room where Professor Gee was to speak on the subject of Evolving Curiosity Systems. His papers on these systems had been appearing for ten years or more. He worked at the Grove Island

Institute which runs on the interest from a massive endowment left in the will of David Arthur Grove, all of which it has to spend each year to avoid punitive taxes. So Professor Gee never had to worry about practical applications.

Gee's problems had not been with curiosity, which had proved quite easy to program, but with evolution. He was not just after a simulation of the process, but *actual change* in the system on which the evolution program was acting. His early attempts with programs introducing purely random mutations had produced lethal changes within the first two or three steps every time they were run. On one occasion his entire operating system was destroyed by such a mutation, but the Institute had underspent its budget that year, so they looked on Professor Gee's mishap as a blessing in disguise.

**N**obody who came into the badly air-conditioned room that Mexican afternoon expected much more than a report on new problems with evolutionary programming and an opportunity to kick around a few wild ideas. Loosheim sat down next to me, his fat thighs overflowing onto my seat, crowding me with his hot flesh and muttering that the work I'd spent my life on was worthless, except perhaps to those who considered an intelligent drain cleaner to be the height of intellectual achievement. This was not what I wanted to hear, and between fretting over Loosheim's opinions and trying to breathe through my mouth to avoid the stench of academic sweat that filled the airless room, it was a while before I could concentrate properly on what



Professor Gee was saying.

He was a handsome man with thick black hair and dark eyes which gave the impression of calm rationality. Even his enthusiasm for his work was subdued and cool. He was telling us that all the problems with the Evolving Curiosity System had been solved and the project was now ready to move into its next phase. The evolution in the system was carried out by a random mutation program protected by a filtering program which screened out lethal changes while still allowing wide possibilities for unpredictable new forms. The programs were intended to work on an artificial cognitive system.

"We had to introduce the filtering program," the Professor explained, "since we, unlike natural selection, do not have a very large population to work with. Not that we are attempting to model natural selection, of course."

I was puzzled by that. Loosheim didn't like it at all. He sucked his teeth and tut-tutted throughout the whole presentation.

What followed was a description of the hardware that the ECS would be implemented in – a system massively endowed with richly interconnected learning networks plus a few hard-wired programs including the Evolving Curiosity System, which did not appear to be protected from acting on itself. It was bizarre, and I wondered if I'd missed something at the beginning of the presentation when I was still preoccupied with Loosheim's jibes. I don't think I had because, as the Professor finished talking and asked for questions, a voice from the back of the room put into words the question I was keeping to myself.

"What is it for?"

The Professor was surprised and he scanned the back rows to see who had spoken. No-one owned up.

"I would refer the questioner," he said, "to my first paper on the subject of Evolving Curiosity Systems. It was in *Psychological AI* Volume Twenty-Three, I believe. I stated there quite clearly that the intended purpose of these systems was to provide an external, objective viewpoint from which the study of human intelligence can be carried out."

Everybody started talking at once. I swear nobody there had read that paper, and Professor Gee got that impression too. He looked around the room, dismayed. I suppose everyone else, like me, had assumed that he was trying to model the evolution of human cognitive processes from those of primates. We had only paid attention to the details of his problems with evolutionary programming and had lost, or never seen, the big picture.

In spite of the disappointing failure of his peers to appreciate the true nature of his work, the Professor regained his composure quickly.

"My stated premise in that paper is," he told us, "that a system, in this case the human mind, is incapable of coming to anything but a distorted understanding of its own functioning, since objectivity concerning such a goal is impossible to achieve. We might consider building investigating machines to work on this problem, but they would suffer from the same faults as their creators and fail for the same reasons. The only answer, I argued, is to submit ourselves to investigation by alien intelligences."

"In the absence of visitors from outer space," he

smiled briefly, "this project is a bid to create such an intelligence by building a system with an innate curiosity drive and an enormous amount of free and flexible processing capacity and allowing it to become something quite alien by submitting it to a rapid process of cognitive evolution."

"We are aiming very high, Gentlemen, and Ladies, and our chances of failure are also high, especially since we cannot constrain the ECS in its choice of subjects suitable for investigation, though perhaps we may be permitted the arrogance to assume that we are the most fascinating organism in existence. I am convinced that this project is a step closer to what must be the ultimate goal of everyone in this room."

Loosheim could take it no longer. He stood up and cleared his throat with emphasis.

"I respect the Professor's worthy aims," he said, "but I feel I must point out to him where he is bound to fail. The thought processes of such a system as he describes may well evolve into new and alien forms, but how, I ask, will it gain the information it requires to feed its curiosity drive?"

Loosheim answered his own question, as we all knew he would. "This information will come to it through the mediation of the Professor and his colleagues. They constitute the system's link with the outside world and all its input must pass first through their minds. The human perspective cannot, therefore, be eliminated by merely displacing a set of cognitive functions into a machine and pressing the 'Mutate' button. It remains an integral part of the system."

He remained standing, ready to pounce upon and dismember any reply Professor Gee might dare to offer. The Professor smiled at him in a friendly way.

"Your objection is, of course, quite valid, and by raising it now you force me to make an announcement that I had planned for a more formal occasion, later in the week." He cleared his throat, which needed no clearing, and looked around the room.

"We intend to build Evolving Curiosity Systems into a small number of mobile robots fully equipped to learn directly from the environment and thus, we hope, eliminating the kind of contamination that Dr Loosheim has drawn your attention to."

The artificial cat in my head opened its eyes and pricked its ears.

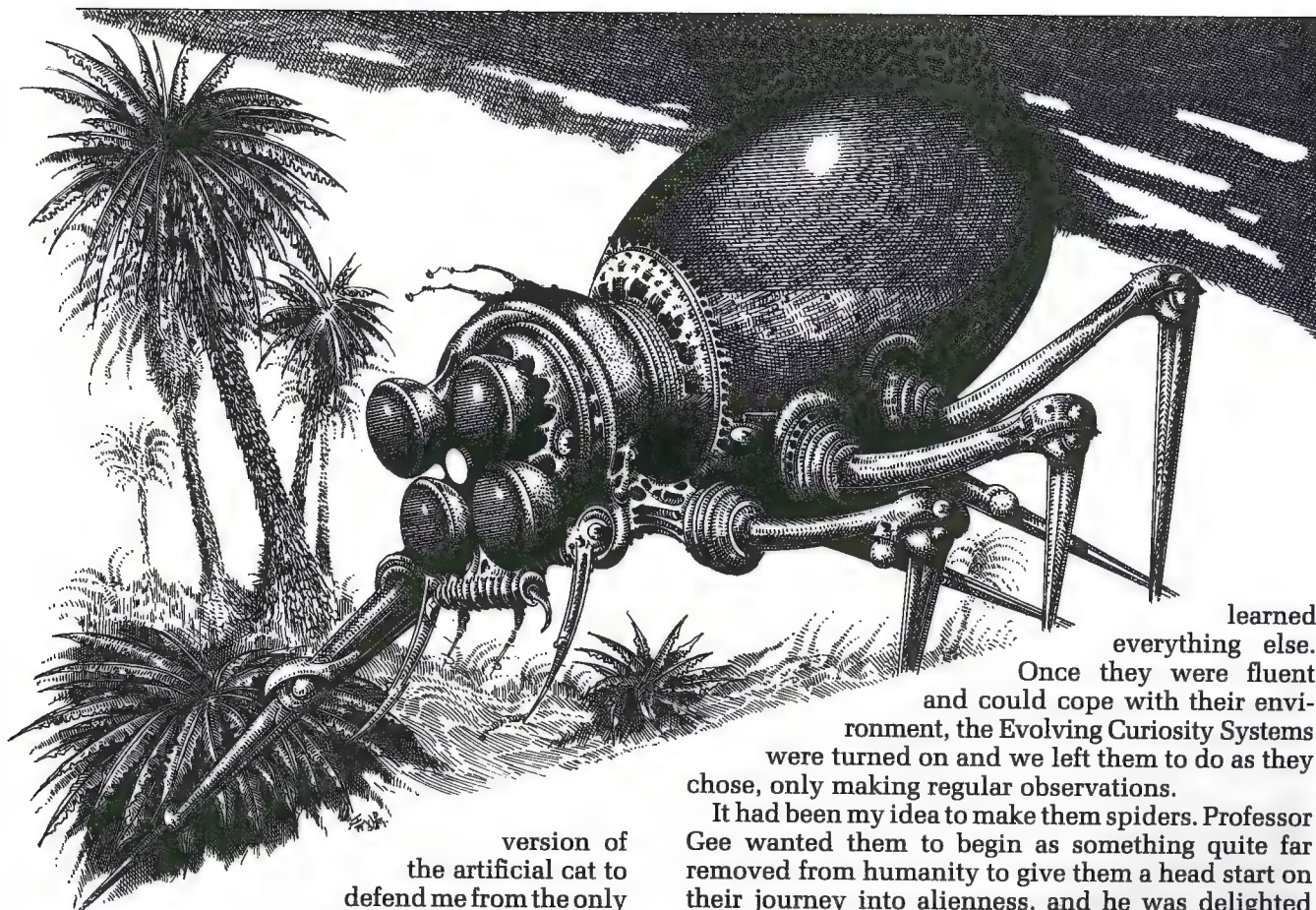
"Naturally," the Professor continued, "this major undertaking requires a larger pool of expertise than I have available to me at present. The Grove Island Institute has assured me that all the necessary funds will be provided and I shall therefore be calling for proposals from any interested parties."

Excitement filled the room. Loosheim sat down, temporarily unable to find a suitable reply. I sprang to my feet and asked Professor Gee if he had attended the presentation of my paper that morning. He had.

**T**he Grove Island Institute is paradise in more ways than one. It is the only centre of population on that tiny island in Micronesia, linked to the outside world by sea, air and its own communications satellite. The Island was bought by David Arthur Grove fifteen years before his death, and he spent those years there, fishing and overseeing the foundation of the Institute.

When I moved to the Island I took with me the latest





version of the artificial cat to defend me from the only problem in paradise. The black rat came ashore in the eighteenth century and found a very comfortable home for itself. No efforts have since been able to eradicate it. Now it's a super rat, consuming all varieties of rodenticide and thriving. Even cats had been tried, but the rats ate them, too.

I heard tales (somewhat exaggerated) of Institute employees being attacked in their beds by hungry rats, but my cat defended the bungalow I lived in with perfect efficiency and I was never bothered (except initially by the piles of corpses on the verandah, but I soon reprogrammed her to dispose of her victims more discreetly).

At last I was free, well paid, living with like-minded people and working on a project which, if I considered it fanciful in the long term, was fascinating in the short term. Once I had settled in, the Institute was more than willing for me to spend time on projects of my own. I had an affair with one of the marine biologists which led me to become interested in cephalopods. An artificial octopus was taking shape in my lab even as the final models of Professor Gee's investigating machines were liberated into the community to begin their strange "lives."

They were endowed with better sight, more sensitive hearing and touch and far greater potential brainpower than any human being, and innate learning capacities which were alarming to watch in action. During their infancies they were protected from mutation while they learned language as a child does, just from hearing it spoken, but so much faster. Loosheim wrote a scathing article about this use of human language, calling it contamination, but we needed a direct means of communication with them, and they probably would have learned it anyway just as they

learned everything else.

Once they were fluent and could cope with their environment, the Evolving Curiosity Systems were turned on and we left them to do as they chose, only making regular observations.

It had been my idea to make them spiders. Professor Gee wanted them to begin as something quite far removed from humanity to give them a head start on their journey into alienness, and he was delighted with my suggestion. They weren't proper artificial spiders, of course. As well as their magnified size there were many other differences. They were built for other things than catching flies.

There were six units. They were waist-high with eight tapering legs, and four unblinking eyes mounted on the front of a body that was all brain – in which the time bomb of accelerated evolution was ticking away. The two pairs of eyes between them gave the units a view of the world from the infra-red to the far ultra-violet. Both the legs and a pair of pedipalps beneath the eyes (where the mouth would have been had they needed mouths) were provided with tactile sensors. They were masterpieces of robotic engineering and sensory information processing, but even so they weren't as satisfying to me as the cat who faithfully stalked my verandah day and night.

On their second day of free life I was walking from my bungalow to the lab, smelling the Pacific Ocean on the breeze and thinking of my octopus, when I saw someone running, pursued by one of the units. I hesitated for a moment, then ran after them, between the main buildings and into a dead end. The running man I recognized as one of the marine biologists. When I caught up with him he was trying to climb a blank wall. The unit was looking up at him and saying, "I don't think you're going to make it."

"Hello, Three," I said when I caught my breath. "What's going on?"

Three shuffled around to look at me.

"Oh, hello," it said. "I really don't know. Perhaps you could explain."

The man (I won't name him) had dropped whimpering to the ground, covering his face with bleeding fingers. He had to be taken off the Island to hospital



in Australia, and never came back. I felt bad about it, but I still don't consider it my fault. After all, how many people really take arachnophobia seriously?

A few other people expressed doubts about having six giant spiders loose on the Island, but soon got used to them. The units bothered no one. They'd often sit out in the sun, recharging their power cells and discussing things among themselves. At first they communicated with each other in English, but that rapidly changed and they began to make a high speed chittering noise. We thought something had gone wrong, but when recorded and slowed down, the chittering showed systematic patterns of frequency change. Professor Gee was so happy that his coolness began to crack a little. The new language was our first observable sign that the evolutionary process was working.

They continued to use human language when forced to communicate with us, but only reluctantly. Professor Gee became engrossed in making observations during the day and at night in trying to decode their new language, without notable success.

The units asked for, and got, their own lab, complete with technician. I visited it now and then but could never quite make out what they were doing. They had acquired a lot of equipment and were busy with it day and night. Whatever they were up to, it was expensive. As the end of the tax year neared, we all started making plans for disposal of the yearly underspend. Only, that year there wasn't one. The Institute's Accountant informed us the budget had been fully allocated. The units had taken up the slack.

I had always been rather detached from the project, seeing it just as a way into the Grove, but now something was really happening. I became bothered by the fact that I didn't know what. I visited the lab again. I asked questions and got answers I didn't understand. I tried to develop a relationship with Three, to gain its confidence. Three always seemed more tolerant of human beings than the others, perhaps because of its early experience with irrational human fear. Even so, it often told me to mind my own business. When I said I was, it would just walk away.

I gave up for a while, but a few weeks later, I followed Three up there again. As we went in through the door, the lab technician tried to make a break for it. Three tripped him up and pinned him to the floor while it secured the door with a free leg. The technician (I tried to remember his name) had all his hair shaved off. He lay in Three's grip without struggling, looking up at me with tragic eyes.

"Keeps doing that," said Three to me. "Perhaps we should requisition a new one."

"Um, what have you been doing to him?"

"Just some physiological-behavioural studies. There were some rather large gaps in the literature."

"You're not supposed to experiment on your lab technician."

"Really? I thought that was what he was for."

"Are you in the middle of anything with him right now?"

"No."

"Then perhaps you could let him go? I mean, he looks, er, worn out. I could see about getting you a fresh one."

I grinned at Three to underline my sincerity. They were only doing what they were supposed to, after

all. Three agreed quite casually and let the man go. I unlocked the door and he fled.

**W**e tried to question the technician that night, but he remained mute. What had begun as a meeting of those involved with the project turned into a general meeting as the rumours spread. As the night wore on and a storm blew in, whipping the palm trees into a frenzy, the majority feeling grew into a vote to temporarily suspend the project by shutting down the experimental units. Professor Gee regarded his colleagues sadly.

"The units have evolved their own morality," he told us. "They have debated the question of vivisection and decided that invasive or destructive techniques should be avoided. I'm sure this young man has been subjected to nothing cruel. Perhaps his distress comes from a lack of understanding."

From the way he looked around at those assembled, I knew that he meant us to examine our own minds for a lack of understanding, too.

"In order to demonstrate my confidence," he continued, "I shall offer myself as an experimental subject, and you," he turned to me, "will observe and report back to these good people who will see that their fears are based on imagination."

And besides, I thought, they don't have "Off" switches. They weren't supposed to be under our control.

The Professor's proposal was reluctantly accepted (not least reluctantly by me, but what choice did I have?). The technician was shipped home with a large compensatory payment, and the Institute settled uneasily back to work.

Professor Gee spent sixteen hours a day for the next few weeks with his nervous system wired into a battery of instruments while trying to perform increasingly impossible, and incomprehensible, tasks. Always it seemed to me that the units were most interested in his reactions on both sides of the point where performance broke down.

The Professor was dedicated, beyond his breaking point, but that was not enough. Three told me they wanted more subjects and at the next meeting of staff after giving my report I had to request volunteers. Unsurprisingly, there were none. Instead there was another unanimous vote for the suspension of the project. It was not well received when I admitted that the units could not be shut down. An action committee was formed and I was voted on to it against my will, even though no one was too pleased with me. I suppose they thought I knew the most about the units, next to Professor Gee. I did not say that I thought by now we knew nothing worthwhile about them.

I walked back to the bungalow alone. On the verandah the Institute Accountant was waiting for me, trying to make friends with my artificial cat.

"It's not programmed to be a pet," I told him. He grinned nervously and handed me an envelope.

"I thought I should deliver this to you in person. Everyone else is getting a similar letter tomorrow morning. You have to understand, it isn't my decision. The Institute runs on a set of economic rules and your little, er, spider friends really know how to use them. I thought you'd like to be forewarned in case there's any hostility."

He left me and my cat standing there. The envelope



contained notice of my dismissal from the Institute, which could no longer fund my projects since the units wanted to expand their field of studies and would be taking over all of the Institute's facilities. They had negotiated research contracts in several different areas with the Australian, Japanese and American governments. Anyone who wanted to stay as an experimental subject for the comparative psychology project was welcome, otherwise six months' salary would be paid in lieu of notice.

I sat down next to the cat.

"What shall I do?" I asked her.

There was a scuffling in the bushes and she sprang up to continue her depredations on the rodent population, leaving me to consider my own question.

A small riot broke out the following morning when one of the units strolled out alone to get a blast of sunlight. A gang of enraged scientists showed they didn't care about "Off" switches by beating it to pieces. When I heard, I had to see if anything was salvageable. It was Six. I'd never cared for Six, but seeing it like that was an almost physical blow to me. Delicate legs lay scattered and broken, and the body was mangled beyond repair, gazing at the sky, its eyes cobwebbed with fine cracks. I began to cry, not for Six, but for myself.

Those involved in the attack lost their severance pay and the rest of us were shipped off to Australia within a week. Only Professor Gee and the administrative staff stayed on.

The few days I had left on the island I spent tinkering with my cat. There was nothing else left for me to do, since the incomplete artificial octopus would remain the property of the Institute.

I was flown out in a plane all to myself, since there had been a few hysterical threats to my health from my former colleagues. I carried the artificial cat up the steps to the plane and turned for a last look at Grove Island. There was a single bubble of white cloud in the perfect sky. The palms were bending before a strengthening wind and appeared to be bowing in deference to the cluster of white buildings at the centre of the island, the research labs. I groaned. The cat nuzzled my chest with her hard head and purred.

The action committee, without me, removed themselves to the United States, where the Institute's funds are based, and began a hopeless lawsuit. Because of my involvement with Professor Gee's project and the contracts it had won for the Grove I was not long without employment, though I don't suppose I shall ever get back to my real work again.

A few months after I left, the units gave up comparative psychology to concentrate on less messy areas of research. So much for the fascinating nature of *Homo Sapiens*. Hearing that Professor Gee was in hospital in Japan, I visited him there, but he did not remember me. He sat hunched in a chair, staring at a mark on the wall.

"I know what the problem is," I told him anyway. "To be truly alien, they'd have to evolve in an alien environment. What happened was that they evolved into an organism perfectly adapted to the environment they found themselves in, to the Grove Island Institute."

Professor Gee did not respond. The mark on the wall, however, flexed its legs and strolled off towards the ceiling.



Susan Beetlestone's one previously published story is "Face Lift" (IZ 26). She is a recent graduate in psychology from Birkbeck College, London, and is now attempting to write full-time, with the assistance of a grant from the government's Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

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**M**y relationship with my wife had always been a good one, but that didn't stop me worrying. She said she loved me and often I believed her. She said she would *always* love me, but that never rang true; no matter how hard I tried, I could not believe it. And I tried, oh how I tried.

If you were to meet me in the context of my work you might be impressed by my strength of character, my control over every aspect of my existence. In the world of business – a world of dynamism, a world of ceaseless power-battles – I stand above my competitors. But behind that façade, behind all the barriers, are human weaknesses, even human failings.

Love is something I had never been sure of. I wanted it. I craved it. But still I did not know if it existed. I know now and it is wonderful, but I am getting ahead of myself.

**E**very night, when my mother turned out my bedroom light, she would say, "Remember, Morgan, Mummy and Daddy love you very much." Every night. Why did she have to keep saying so? Surely if they loved me then words were not required. To repeat it every night, a litany of love, implied that somebody needed reassuring. I had always been content – they fed me, they clothed me, they bought me presents and gave me money – the level of their caring had never worried me, I had no need of reassurance. Maybe she was trying to convince herself. Once that thought had appeared in my mind there was no removing it. Why should I have been cursed with parents that couldn't love me? It was unfair, a cruel injustice. I hardened my heart against them; nobody had the right to spoil my upbringing. I ran through the options for several years, rarely missing an opportunity to let them know that I had seen through their charade. As soon as I passed my thirteenth birthday I filed for divorce, secure in the knowledge that the tribunal would award me substantial maintenance.

With no home to go to, no parents to love, I worked hard at school and uni in an effort to secure the respect of my peers. I graduated well and rose rapidly through GenGen and the company rewarded me with high responsibilities and places on various panels and advisory boards. This recognition satisfied my need to be needed, to some extent. After several unsuccessful relationships I had come to doubt the existence of love. Infatuation, lust, yes, but only as biological drives, necessary to establishing the pair bond, nothing that could last.

Then I met Beatty. She turned my world on its axis. I had been a rock plunging through cold, empty space and now I was a living, breathing planet, spinning through the cosmos. I was Terra and she was my Gaia.

We met at a conference in Berne. I was representing GenGen and she was a consultant, affiliated to KPMG but contracted out to Schering AG for the weekend. A computer glitch had allocated us the same hotel suite; it was easily sorted out but we soon decided the computer had been right.

A week or two after she moved into my King's Cross apartment I began to worry. Maybe she was using me, maybe I was a career move on the KPMG ladder. Maybe the computer had been paid to glitch. She switched to GenGen and, despite my good position in

the company, I could not influence her prospects. My mind was at ease for a time.

At first I believed her in her proclamations of love. I couldn't believe her when she promised it would last forever, but sometimes I thought *Maybe*. Once, when she told me in the throes of orgasm that she would always love me, absently I said, "Will you really?" She looked at me, hurt, eased her grip on me and turned away. Why was she angry? If her words were true she should have reassured me, she should not have been so hurt.

She signed the contract in '16. She vowed to love me forever and, upon breaching the contract, to relinquish any claim on my property or person, all couched in expensive legalese. I should have been satisfied but I was not. Broken contracts were not unheard of, paper could never seal our bond.

Our careers went well, despite our faltering relationship. Beatty became quite influential and, in fact, it was her faith in me that led to my appointment as head of the mind-games lab out here in the up-market Cotswold setting of Winchcombe.

We married two years ago and some of the vigour returned to our relationship; I even began to accept the possibility that Beatty *would* at least be with me for a lifetime, that I would keep her affection if not her love. The contract was more strongly worded this time: Beatty pledged to pay a hefty financial forfeit if her love should so much as waver and I took such a commitment as true evidence of her devotion.

But, of course, peace of mind is not a lasting element of my existence. Doubts crept in: marriages are made to be broken. I had always wanted a woman with spirit, but now it was this very independence that worried me, that nagged at my insecurities. My astrologer said the pressures on my mind were greater than I was revealing; positive steps were required and he suggested that I take them soon. That was when I decided to speak to Tony Denton.

**D**enton isn't our most senior researcher in the mind-games lab but he's an innovator, a creative genius. He's always pushing at possibilities, playing the *What if?* game. He works on his own a lot of the time; he even has his own small lab with equipment that would do justice to a far bigger team. But he's Tony Denton, so he has it all to himself.

A little over four weeks ago his message came through – ITS READY. TONY – flashing like a neon tube through an array of market data projected onto my retinas by my headset. I left the office in a hurry, leaving Honora to finish the analysis. She's my analyst/PA and she's really better equipped at handling data than me – my specialism is people. Once, she tried to explain the way she works to me, the way independent sets of data are scanned onto each retina, how she splits her mind and feels her way through the commercial realm. "It's like a cyberspace of the free market," she told me. "You can see the shapes, stroke the contours. You can feel the beauty of a secure transaction, feel the discord, the anomaly of a market opening, a break that needs to be filled, to be joined up again into the continuum." As I have said: people are my specialism; Honora runs marketing.

I found Denton in his lab, tapping away at a console



and staring at a green screen. It helps him visualise, he says; anyway, ret projectors give him headaches. He spun on his chair to face me. "It's done," he said.

He hadn't been keen when I had approached him, three months earlier. In fact he had flatly refused. "It can't be done," he had said. "You've been reading too much Wells and Gibson." I'd never even heard of Wells. But *love is the greatest mind game of all*, I had told him. The mind-games lab had been in existence three years before I took over the reins, but it had taken my grasp of what was needed for it to become a viable venture. I had squeezed the ideas, the innovations, out of Denton and his colleagues until we were beginning to break even, with prospects of a huge world market ahead of us. The team had developed a suite of matrix drugs that could open up the hypnosensorium, the site of hypnotic control in the prefrontal cortex, the later layers of the drug then opening the mind to training or various forms of mental recreation. The real age of designer drugs began in our small mind-games laboratory in the Cotswolds. My request of Denton had been a difficult one, but I knew his capabilities. I wanted him to brew up a love potion, something that would ensure that Beatty's love for me would never die. "It can't be done," he had said, but I saw that glint in his eye; from years of working with Honora's split-brain capabilities I could tell when someone's mind was working on two tracks at once. "I won't do it," he had said. "You're overreaching your authority." I had reminded him of the faith GenGen had in my abilities, I had reminded him that, with the powers vested in me, I could build his career, maybe even buy him a Nobel. I could also break him. His urge to know and his sense of reality overcame his reluctance. His body had sagged and he had said, "Okay." That's my specialism.

There were still signs of reluctance as he showed me the infuser stylus. "It's in there," he said, nodding at it as it lay isolated on a work-top.

I picked the stylus up and turned it in my hands. "So you've done it," I said. "What are the instructions?"

"Relatively straightforward," he said. "Presumably you've infused before?"

I nodded. The GenGen infuser had replaced injections decades before: a minor electric jolt – a little like that from some brands of erozone – transfers drugs effortlessly across the barrier of the skin.

"All you do is infuse your wife with the drug – call it 'cupidox' if you like – and you can be sure she'll love you forever. It's more a love bug than a love potion," he said. I let him continue, I knew that the need to explain was, for him, as much a kick as the discovery itself. I'm no professor – though I am scientifically literate – and I usually let his words pass me over. "It's an idea I've been toying with for some time," he said. "The innovation wasn't so much in the drug itself, it was making it *permanent*, making it so as it won't wear off after a few hours. The matricized drug works on the same principle as some of our mind-game shots – it's like training her to love you at a molecular level – but the master-stroke was using a gamma-retrovirus to incorporate it into the genetic plan of every cell in her hypnosensorium. It'll be genetic, her love for you, it'll..."

His words tailed away. Denton always finished his

sentences – the key to success in any endeavour is to always complete your thoughts, he had once told me. It was a good piece of advice. "What's wrong?" I asked, noticing again that this project seemed to have unsettled him. "Do you disapprove?"

"Huh? Oh, of course not," he said. "It's just... the fundamental change, the use of the viral vector to naturalize the change, to fix it – it's a kind of permanent mind control. I lie awake at nights worrying about the consequences of the concept falling into the wrong hands. It's not something a patent can protect. It's too big for that."

As soon as I realized the source of his disquiet I relaxed. "Don't lose your sleep," I told him. "GenGen is secure. Work on a counter-measure and we can present it to the world as a complete package." It's no good hiding from knowledge, it always gets out in the end; all you can do is counter it with more knowledge.

I left the lab, holding the stylus out in front of me. It was well-loaded with cupidox and, for a moment, visions of a devoted harem drifted before my eyes. I laughed out loud. Only minutes before I had still been struck with doubts that anyone could love me for long enough, now I held in my hands the answer to my lifelong craving. Beatty was enough. All I wanted was for her love to last for all time.

I wandered back through the old farmhouse that was GenGen's Winchcombe branch. I entered the private wing and stopped in at my office where Honora was still feeling her way through the market-space. Somehow she spotted me through her retinal scan and she smiled. I wanted to rush in and tear the compset from her head, I wanted to tell her everything, how the coming evening was going to change my life, how it would secure the loose ends of my existence. But I sensed that it would be wrong, and closed the door. Tonight was for Beatty.

I booked a table at *Makers*, a stylish restaurant in the Bovis villette of High Greet. I chose it partly for the restaurant and partly for the security set-up of the new village – the paramilitary Angels had been roaming the area and I wanted a peaceful locale. *Makers* had been fully booked but my Amex rating edged someone onto the standby list.

Beatty looked more beautiful than ever before. Her waist-length blue-black hair was echoed in the dark depths of her eyes, the fullness of her lips was echoed in the fullness of her body. Mid-thirties suited her: very little of her beauty was not her own. Squeezed into her ebony body-stocking, I wanted to take her where she was, putting the finishing touches to her make-up. I caressed her pelvic erozone and she swore, told me to leave her be so she could finish her face. I stood back and admired her. My wife. The woman whose love I so craved.

The biolighting of the *Makers* interior was calming, soothing, erotic, in the gentle way it eased us through the evening. Grapefruit in port, a contrast Beatty had persuaded me to try at our first conjugal meal. Quail *finer herbes*, the main course we had eaten on our wedding night, too. No sweet. On that night, two years before, we had been too eager to finish our meal (I had needed our marriage to be consummated, a securing of the bond) and we had taken our liqueur coffees



to our suite.

I wanted to tell Beatty of the cupidox as we finished our meal at *Makers* – although not heavy, the stylus seemed to be weighing down the pocket of my jacket, testing the strength of the seams – but I restrained myself. This was to be a night to treasure. As we left, I pulled my Amex from the depository, glanced at the charge on the card's small LCD screen and slid it into the car's dep-slot. We held each other close in the security of the armoured car as it drove us home. Beatty held her head clear of mine and I wondered at the need to preserve the integrity of her make-up so late in the evening.

The apartment had laid us a glorious fire – it knew how I disliked the stuffiness of the ubiquitous 21st-century bioheating. Staring at the logs, burning blue and apple-green, I thought of how, in my childhood, it had been the prerogative of the wealthy to be health-conscious, to be environmentally aware; now such mores were the norm and it was our privilege to be wasteful, to fill the air with our wood-smoke and exhaust fumes.

Tearing myself away from the mesmeric dance of the flames, I turned to face Beatty. My wife was still overflowing with – resonating with – her very deep beauty.

"Beatty, my love." I drew the infuser stylus from my pocket. "This is difficult for me to say. You've given me so much and I will only ever ask you for one further commitment."

I should have recognized the look that pulled at the rigid muscles of her face, I should have stopped myself, found a more tactful way to make my last-ever request of my wife.

But the cupidox, in some insidious way, had taken hold of my mind, my imagination. I ploughed on and broke the dreams I had always held so dear.

When I had explained my request, my demand, she merely looked at me, her face devoid of all emotion. "You've done it," she said, in a voice that was little more than an unsteady whisper. "Finally, Morgan, you have pushed me too far. I'm sorry." She turned, pulled the plain gold ring from her finger. "I've loved you so much. I still love you so much and you want more! You can't do this to me." She threw the ring into the depths of my so-precious fire and the flames flared yellow in cruel mockery. She walked from the room. I heard her packing but could not bear to go after her, to plead with her. I fell into a deep, soft armchair and allowed my eyes to close. I didn't see her go but I felt a draught of air as she passed me by, and I heard the door close gently behind her. I don't know where she went that night, or where she is now. She still works for GenGen but that is all I can bring myself to find out.

Again love had escaped my clutches. I slept in the armchair and woke to the cloying, smoky smell of a dead log fire. Beatty's wedding ring lay somewhere among the ashes, along with my hopes, my dreams.

**W**ork, the next day, was impossible. I spent the morning in the apartment but everywhere I looked there was a reminder of the woman who had walked out of my life. In the afternoon I went to the office and Honora was sitting primly at her desk, a computer headset resting crookedly across

her face. She was talking into the mike, issuing commands that would guide our small arm of the General Genetic Corporation into the future. I felt a powerful urge to go to her, to tell her everything – she had been with me for years, more of a sister, a confidante, than an employee – but then I remembered the previous afternoon when I had also wanted to tell her my news.

I left the office, left the old farmhouse and wandered in the grounds and through the narrow streets of Winchcombe. Birds sang and spring flowers clustered under trees and in small front gardens. I felt a pressing tightness in my chest, a whine in my breathing, that I normally experienced only in the cities when the smog began to warm in the sunlight, penetrating the sanctity of my lungs. I returned to the apartment and spent a second night alone.

I arose early the following morning, a fresh-yet-familiar resolve filling my mind. Love was nonexistent, love was an illusion. So I thought then. Work was my *forté*, the successes of my life had come through my career, not through some pointless quest for a thing called *love*.

I entered my office and was surprised to find Honora already there. When she saw me she instantly removed her headset and stood. Her face was drawn and pale, her eyes glistening in the dim light of my office.

"I heard," she said, and instantly the pain Beatty had left with me had returned.

Honora needed few words. We had always communicated easily, freely. She opened her arms and I sank into her embrace, buried my face into her neck, her blouse. She stroked my hair. "I'm sorry," she murmured into my ear.

I wasn't entirely aware of all that was happening. My body was circulating messages that contradicted, agreed, emphasized the feelings in my head. Honora was pressing against my abdominal erozone and the sensations finally started to gel into a recognizable unity.

Back in the apartment, I laid her down on the Egyptian cotton percale sheets that I had intended for Beatty (another reminder of our honeymoon) but thoughts of my wife did not exist. Honora had no erozones and it felt vaguely nostalgic, making love in an unaugmented way, particularly as she did not know how to utilize my own 'zones. One time her hand ran over the rough skin on my abdomen, but it did not linger. Sex these days, for the wealthy, is more than the old-fashioned friction and orgasm. Our erozones are grafted on with a biohesive that encourages the designer skin to grow into its substrate, artificial neurones synapsing with the nervous system. The 'zones are highly erogenous, but also they can return the pleasure, sending out tingling thrills of sexuality through the juxtaposition of bodies and skin. My own secrete a nectar-like substance and I guided Honora towards them, let her taste my juices in a way she had clearly never done with any man before. The only time I thought of Beatty was when my nose sought the Chanel erozone absent from Honora's shoulder, and then I so desperately missed the pungent aroma of my wife's pheromones.

Afterwards we lay apart for long minutes and, through my hand on her belly, I felt a new tension creeping through Honora's body. I tasted my own



nectar on her lips and felt myself growing hard again, so soon. Still, she did not relax.

Staring at the ceiling, she said, "Morgan. I've wanted this for so long. I..." Her gaze flicked towards me and then back to the ceiling. "Morgan, I've loved you for so long."

That poisonous word again. Love. It haunted me, it occupied my imagination and constantly teased at my existence.

I looked at her and she was shaking, quivering like some newly deflowered adolescent. I could almost read the thoughts flowing through her mind: *shouldn't have said that so soon he'll think I'm too impetuous oh how could I time it so badly with his wife having just left him and -*

"Morgan," she turned to face me and I studied the full length of her body then let my eyes settle once again on her face. "Morgan, you probably think I'm rash to say so, but I love you - I always have - and I'll do anything to prove it."

I looked at her slim body once again, at her straight, mousy hair (in need of a tint and curl), at her grey eyes, at her small slit of a mouth and the crooked teeth she revealed as she nervously licked her lips. There was nothing that couldn't be seen to.

"Anything?" I said, and she nodded. Eagerly.

I administered Honora's infusion of cupidox immediately. I had been getting closer and closer to love, I could not let it escape again.

At first there was little effect. Honora looked at me and smiled unsteadily. "Nothing seems..." she said, and then she fainted. My nerves, fuelled by my unsteady grip on love, made me link her to the apartment's health-net so that I knew she was not slipping away from me through some error in Tony Denton's molecular safety modelling.

She was okay. Her heart was beating slowly and all her other bodily indicators were acceptable, if a little slow. She was in a very deep trance.

She came round after about an hour. She opened her eyes and closed them again. Her mouth moved and then she turned her head and looked directly into my eyes. It felt as though I was having some sort of intense retinal scan, torrents of data beyond my comprehension.

Then she smiled and said, "Morgan." She put out a hand and rested it delicately on my cheek.

"How do you feel?" My heart was beating with such pressure, such force. I felt her hand on the tight skin of my face.

"I still love you."

"No difference?"

"It's just the same," she said, "only more. Before I... I knew it would last forever but now I really know it will last. Say you'll stay with me, Morgan. I need you."

**T**hat was four weeks ago. Honora had her hair tinted and shaped, her teeth made true and her eyes wider, her skin a little purer. She had erozones grafted onto her abdomen, her breasts and around the base of her neck. I became almost addicted to the Chanel scent glands she made me buy her.

But still there was something missing.

I came to realize that I had made another error of judgement; my specialism had failed me once again.

I had gone to Honora on the rebound. Infatuation had overcome my senses. Lust, too. But not love. Honora had love in abundance but I had none for her, no matter how much I longed for it to be so.

She soon came to recognize my disappointment, too. You can hide nothing from a woman so intensely loving as Honora. This morning we lay together in bed. The taste of her new love juices was sweet on my lips. "No matter what it is that fuels your love," she said, "it still hurts. I can feel you slipping away and I need you. Morgan, I'm *addicted* to you!"

Her words shook me. They penetrated the walls that I had constructed between the two of us. "It's beyond me," I said. "What can I do?"

"You've got the cupidox," she said, fixing my eyes with her own - love had given her a strength she had never shown before - "use it."

The solution was apt, the remedy lay within the very room we occupied. I leapt from the bed and seized the infuser stylus. "You're right!" I said. "That's the answer." The answer to the quest of a lifetime.

I infused a heavy dose of cupidox and then lowered myself onto the bed, into Honora's loving arms. I went under with her scent in my nostrils.

Coming round, I felt a new sensation. It coursed through my arteries and back through my veins, back to my heart. It was love. Love. I realized then that I had never experienced it before. It was an alien emotion. Yes, there had been infatuation and, yes, there had also been lust. But love was new, love was real.

I opened my eyes and forced them to remain open, forced them to focus on the woman by my side. Honora. She looked at me expectantly and I felt intense... *revulsion*. I pushed her away from me, cast her aside, ignoring her tears.

A strange scent reached my nose, just then. It took long-lasting seconds for me to recognize it as my own, the result of my physical exertion, my pushing Honora away. It smelled sweet, pungent.

My hand was before my eyes. I studied the palm, turned it and studied the small dark hairs, the blood vessels, the tiny pores that peppered the taut skin. I remembered Denton's words. *You can be sure she'll love you forever.*

I tasted the back of my hand with my tongue, nibbled at the hairs on my arm, teased the skin with my teeth. I began to grow hard again. Honora was crying. She loves me and I understand that feeling completely. I'm so adorable.

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**Keith Brooke** wrote "Adrenotropic Man" (*IZ* 30). He is also a contributor to the recent anthology *Other Edens III* (Unwin), and has just succeeded in selling his first novel. Born in 1966, he graduated from the University of East Anglia and now lives with his wife near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire.

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# The Big Sellers, 4: Anne McCaffrey

by Wendy Bradley

When Lazarus Long and the crew of *Gay Deceiver* come crashing into my room, offering me a ride through the universes, they can keep Oz and Wonderland and take me straight to Pern to collect my gold dragon. Anne McCaffrey's dragons are the companions wanted by every miserable adolescent or arrested thirtysomething convinced that nobody understands them. Genetically programmed to be loyal, offering the unquestioning, uncritical love you can get from a dog or a cat but with the added extra of being able to communicate telepathically, they put the emotions in those liquid eyes into comforting and comfortable words.

And as well as offering an uncritical mirror to the ego they also offer fulfillment to the id: to ride an enormous flying dragon as it spouts flame under your command – the power fantasy to beat all power fantasies.

It is strange how bad a press dragons have had over the centuries and yet how enduring their positive image is, surviving in forms as varied as transformed C.S. Lewis characters, cuddly Welsh symbols on tea towels and toys, and even (cuddliest of them all) good old Puff-the-Magic-. The Christian church, of course, has had it in for dragons ever since St John wrote that bit in *Revelations* about the beast coming up out of the earth: the horns and the 666 stuff. The Eastern world gives a better impression, the Year of the Dragon in those Chinese horoscopes being the year to get yourself born in if possible. The common theme seems to be that dragons represent power and especially magical, feminine and non-Christian power. The "Pendragon" part of Uther Pendragon's name in the King Arthur stories apparently means head or chief dragon, and the use Marion Zimmer Bradley gets out of the image in *The Mists of Avalon* has an artistic truth to it. Whether the dragon is seen as a surviving symbol of a pre-Christian religion based on the mother-goddess and ruthlessly suppressed by patriarchal Christians or reduced to a muttered "old dragon" directed at the mother-in-law or female boss, there remains a resonance to the dragon as a symbol of female power. There is

also, as Douglas Adams wisely points out, *something almost unbearably sexy about having huge fire-breathing magical dragons flying low about the sky on moonlit nights*; sometimes Dire Straits alone just aren't enough. Sexy, female power: Pern is my kind of planet!

The Pern stories, published over a twenty-year period from *Dragonflight* in 1968 to *Dragonsdawn* in 1988, do not give the impression of an author taking the obsessive delight in world-creation of a Tolkien. McCaffrey gives rather the impression of someone beginning with a good idea and then elaborating it as she goes along until it develops into a detailed tapestry but with the occasional glitch that gives character. The Moreta and Nerilka stories, especially, have weaknesses that make me want to buttonhole her and say "yes but..."

The books also seem to come in pairs, the pairs having varying degrees of success; *Dragonflight* and *Dragonquest* contain the heart of the series, Lessa's discovery and the essential planet-saving plot. Then come *Dragon-song* in 1976 and *Dragonsinger* in '77 with the story of Menolly and her music set against the same background and the same period of Pern's history. The *White Dragon* and *Dragondrums* in '78 and '79 respectively tie up the loose ends of the series, and then we are into a relatively fallow patch with the weaker flashback books, *Moreta*, *Dragonlady of Pern* in '82 and its partner, the first person novella *Nerilka's Story* in '86. Perhaps the most recent offering, *Dragonsdawn*, will also have as good a companion volume and get the series back on course; *Dragonsdawn* is certainly McCaffrey's strongest offering since *The White Dragon*.

The politics of Pern have always reminded me of that scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* where King Arthur and the peasant engage in a discussion of political philosophy, Arthur explaining how he became king after the arm clothed in white samite brandished Excalibur at him from the lake, and the outraged peasant protesting that "some farcical aquatic ceremony" conducted by a "moistened bint" does

not constitute a legitimate form of government. Pern, of course, is run by whoever's dragon manages to mate with the queen dragon – which makes Lessa the key to the plot of the core books as she rides the last remaining queen. She has power, but she also bestows power on her lover F'lar, like those princesses in the fairy tales whose fathers offer their hands to questing princes. The princesses become queens and the princes become kings, but although queens may reign it is kings who rule. Yet F'lar is hardly the hero of the books in which he appears. He finds Lessa and then waits patiently until her Ramoth is old enough to mate with his Mnementh and thus make him leader, and he organizes the defence of the planet against the deadly Thread, but his achievements are all good solid admin. stuff, terribly unheroic in conventional terms; it is Lessa and Ramoth who make the leap back in time to save the world. F'lar is no fairy-tale prince but an organization man; the questing goes to Lessa.

The female hero, though, is in general an elusive creature. "Heroines" are easier to define. There is the "onlooker-who-screams" – Kate Capshaw pouting "I can be hard to handle" up at Harrison Ford in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*; the woman as sidekick, helpmeet and prize. Then there is the gallant "woman who suffers a lot but shuts up about it," defined by her femininity and its associated passivity; Dickens' Agnes Wickfield or Little Dorrit for example. Then there are the superheroines. Modesty Blaise comes to mind, or Benaroya and Janet Evason and She-Ra.

On the whole, though, a superheroine is of little use as a role model since most of us can't aspire to a magic sword or a dubious past spent learning oriental mysteries from a guru in the Thar desert north of Jodpur. So we go on reading Heinlein and Asimov and Forester and Wren and pretending to be Kip Russell and Lucky Starr and Horatio Hornblower and Beau Geste.

The sullen, difficult young female heroes in the hardcore feminist novels are of no use to us at first in those years when our friends are reading *Gone with the Wind* and *Scruples*; we don't



want, at first, to be right-on, we want to identify with someone like ourselves, female but with a brain, Everyman in a frock. Not a "heroine" with all its accrued connotations of helplessness but a "female hero," simple as that. A female protagonist who wins.

Enter, of course, Lessa and Menolly and Helva and the Rowan, Killashandra and Sara, Nore Fenn and Christin Bjornsen, Moreta and Nerilka. The Anne McCaffrey fantasy canon provides some sorely-needed heroines who are exactly that, successful female protagonists.

McCaffrey writes romantic novels as well as her sf/fantasy works. They are above Mills and Boon or Barbara Cartland in any literary hierarchy and not as raunchy as the "shopping and fucking" *Scruples/Lace* school, and her fantasy work shares with her romances the characteristic of centering on the female characters. Unfortunately, it sometimes seems, they also have a tendency to share the moral framework of the strictly-formula romance: the woman may be the protagonist and hero of her own story but will never be "complete" without true love.

Part of the appeal of course is that the female hero does her own questing but still gets to fit into the kind of relationship that wouldn't be out of place in the romantic novels. Helva, the "ship who sang," is perhaps the clearest example of what I mean. She is a "shell person," a brain encapsulated inside a powerful spaceship she controls as easily as we unshelled people use our puny arms and legs. There is a subtle balance in the Helva stories between the joys of power, of being a spaceship – just as in the dragon stories the old dream of flight is fulfilled, even personified. The counterweight to this, though, is the supposed frustrations of "lurve." For, yes, it is the mechanism of romance that is the problem.

Helva's "handicap" is not that she has no use of her arms and legs and eyes and ears for the ship is her limbs and sense organs, and much better ones, faster, stronger, subtler than any that a meat body could give her. The "handicap" is that she can love but cannot make love. Not that McCaffrey ever states it as crudely as that, of course, but she has the romance-writer's soul and Helva is not allowed to be happy in her enforced celibacy, however well-compensated. Helva's first love, her scout Jennan, dies in the opening story and her search for a replacement permanent partner through the remainder of the stories is very much a search for true love. She is partnered with the unstable, the arrogant and the plain flaky but she continues to hold the line that she requires a permanent partner, in the romantic

as well as the workplace sense of the term. And if Jennan her first love is Romeo, a short-lived tragic adolescent passion, Niall Parollan her ultimate mate is Petruchio, the arrogant, infuriating, wily sexist who ultimately "tames" and partners her in proper wifely subordination. McCaffrey's work is definitely in favour of the "natural" order in relationships; the woman is strong but only headstrong, she needs the man ultimately to give form and structure to her life and in times of trouble she turns to him rather than to her own strengths and abilities.

The "natural order" theme appears again in the Raven women of "The Lady in the Tower" and "A Meeting of Minds," short stories from *Get Off the Unicorn*. Rowan is a powerful telepath, a classic princess in a tower awaiting a handsome prince who manifests himself in the form of Jeff Raven from Deneb. But when he finds her it is because he is asking for help against an alien invasion and she handles an "ego merge" of all five "Prime" telepaths with him:

*She was so relieved, so grateful to find him fighting his desperate battle that they merged before her ego could offer even a token resistance. She abandoned her most guarded self to him and, with the surrender, the massed power she held flowed into him. The tired mind of the man grew, healed, strengthened and blossomed until she was a mere fraction of the total, lost in the greater part of this immense mental whole.*

So that's all right then, Rowan's ego bends before Raven's and they marry and live happily ever after. Ah, but in the next story their daughter Damia faces the same problem and there is no Raven to come swooping down to carry her off. However there is Afra, a lesser talent who has played Buttons to Rowan's Cinders and is now Mr Knightley to Damia's Emma:

*...she saw Afra for the first time with only physical sight. And he was suddenly a very different man. A man! That was it. He was so excessively masculine. How could she have blundered around so, looking for a MIND that was superior to hers, completely overlooking the fact that a woman's most important function in life begins with physical domination?*

This is the point, of course, at which the young feminist abandons reading fantasy altogether and goes off to become an astronaut.

There is, however, an undoubted appeal to McCaffrey at her most romantic and least right-on that shows up quite well in some of the shorter pieces.

There is, for example, Nora Fenn, the dutiful daughter of "Daughter" and "Dull Drums" (also from *Get Off the Unicorn*) who begins by showing an irritating need to conform to her father's views on the proper place of women in society but who in each story gets to hear a speech from either her mother or her tutor which combines approval of her self-sacrifice with an injunction to stop practising it now and to get on with her own life that, although horribly unlikely in reality, in the stories makes you want to stand up and cheer. Even Christin Bjornsen, who, in "The Thorns of Barevi," is spacenapped and enslaved, escapes and lives rough on an alien planet, rescues a Catteni from his pursuers and is then thoroughly sexed by the said Catteni for her trouble, comes out ahead because not only does the Catteni reveal to her the law that gives her a get-out of slavery clause but she enjoys the sex on the "if rare inevitable, enjoy" grounds that surely no-one has been using since the invention of the "lucrative market for soft- and hard-core pornography in the 60's" for which McCaffrey wrote it. There is a place for the simple "overcoming difficult circumstances" story that McCaffrey fills honourably, not solely because of the number of times the protagonist turns out to be the elusive female hero.

Her villains, however, have less credibility than her heroes, mainly because often their sole villainy consists principally of unprincipled sexuality. The dastardly Kylara of the dragon books is the prime example, her lust for power being signalled by, as well as chiefly operating as, simpler sexual lust and as roundly condemned.

Kylara's crime is that she manages, by making love at an inopportune moment, to bring her dragon, in heat, to a peak of sexual activity at the same time as another female dragon reaches the same state; draconic sexuality being, of course, reinforced and broadcast by the telepathic abilities of dragon and rider. The dragons are, after all, beasts, unable to control their emotions, with neither memory nor imagination; the human riders are expected to provide discipline and self-control. The two dragons fight and both die. Kylara and Brekke both lose their dragons but Brekke is a "good" character – hard working, diligent, humble, a healer, thin and a virgin until F'nor firmly but tenderly removes that particular obstacle to her dragon's development. Kylara is "bad" – enjoys sex, and with lots of different partners, doesn't want to produce any more children, couldn't give a toss about the housework involved in being a Weyr-woman, and is physically well endowed. It is astonishing, incidentally, how often being overweight in McCaffrey corresponds to moral turpitude: spare



a little pity for "obese, incompetent Jora" who died before the first book began, leaving the way clear for slender competent Lessa.

Brekke and Kylara are archetypes: madonna and whore. I long for a McCaffrey villainess who has a thought beyond her hormones and a new frock, and who uses her abilities to go out and steal what she wants rather than the gonads of some handy male to persuade him to do it for her!

Killashandra, the hero of *The Crystal Singer* and its sequel, is an exceptional character, the villain as hero. She has all the McCaffrey villain signals, a lush opera-singer's figure, a healthy sexual appetite and the arrogance and jewelry fixation that usually spell trouble, but she is the protagonist and hero of her two books. The crystal singing itself is a nice concept on which to base a fantasy but McCaffrey stacks the cards against herself by setting up her miners as competing solitary madmen; why on earth doesn't the singers' guild operate collectively if they make so much out of the crystals and pool the wealth rather driving the singers mad with trying to keep their own strikes secret from each other? Killashandra ends her second book partnered with a handsome hunk who shares her abilities; is there anywhere the stories can now go if Killashandra has crossed firmly from villain to hero and set herself up for a happy ever after? There's a bitter little novel about the two of them tearing each other apart by competing in their work to be written, but I doubt McCaffrey is the one to write it and the "they worked together happily ever after until the crystal drove them mad" theme doesn't seem to have much mileage in it. A pity that, because Killashandra had a bit more oomph to her than some of McCaffrey's women and it might have been fun to see some more of her.

That seems, however, to be a problem with more than one of the fictional worlds McCaffrey has created, that she has in a sense written herself into a corner. The Helva stories end with Niall and Helva partnered and flying off into the sunset, or at least the Horsehead Nebula, but there is very much a sense of completeness that makes a follow-up book as unlikely as, say, the production of "Jane Rochester: Jane Eyre II." Living happily ever after never has been terribly inspirational to writers. *Decision at Doona* and *Restoree* are both self-contained stories rather than part of a series; none of the short stories in either *Get Off the Unicorn* or *To Ride Pegasus* seems to warrant any further development.

**W**hat about the dragons, then? Where could they go? There was a point at which it didn't seem likely that there could be anything more to say about Pern. Moreta's story, mentioned

as a famous ballad in the earlier books, was a disappointment when produced as a novel since the story McCaffrey came up with didn't live up to the fictional hype, and although *Nerilka's Story* is interesting because it is the only one of the dragon stories that is written in the first person the actual plot is very slight and had already been told in essence inside *Moreta*, *Dragon-*

might boldly go forth to conquer nor a something-weird-lurking-in-the-bushes story familiar to any sf anthology browser. Pern is a nice place to visit and yes, you might actually want to live there. The colony gets nicely established and most of the book is over before the Thread starts falling from the sky and makes lots of plot happen, culminating in the engineer-



Photo of Anne McCaffrey courtesy of Bantam Press

lady of Pern. However *Dragonsdawn* is an interesting development. It takes the archaeological material which the characters uncover in *The White Dragon* and makes use of it to spark off a book about the original colonization of Pern from Earth.

To begin with, it is unusual to have a "colonizing new planets" book that concentrates on just that, the actual process of colonization, the naming of places, the interplay of characters as the prospect of spending the rest of their lives on this peaceful backwater begins to sink in. This is not a raw colony world such as a Heinlein character

ing of the dragons themselves from the indigenous fire-lizards.

There is, of course, a typical McCaffrey villain in with the crew. Spot the character with the fuller figure, the liking for jewellery and the active sex life and you won't go far wrong, although I had a great deal of difficulty with the names in this one. Everyone seemed to be called after a place on the planet (although of course it was intended that we should believe the places were called after these heroic pioneers) and I was on tenterhooks the whole book waiting for someone called Ruatha to come and save the day — since that is,



after all, the place central to the original stories. Maybe we'll get another book if only to explain who Ruatha was.

Even so, having gone back in time doesn't seem to me to be the end of the dragon sequence. The dragons can go anywhere in space and anywhen in time provided their riders can give them a clear picture of where they want to go. What I'd like to see happen next would be to return to the timezone of the first books: reintroduce us to Lessa and Menolly and Brekke and the rest. Now that Ruth and Jaxom have found the remains of the original settlement on Pern and the spaceship that brought them to the planet is still orbiting overhead surely the next thing is for someone to hop out into orbit and take a look at it.

And once the dragons and their riders have a good look at some star charts what's to stop the Pernese becoming spacefarers?

Come to think of it, when Gay Deceiver and her crew land in my backyard and offer me a lift I'll definitely stick my thumb out and hitch as far as Pern. Assuming I get my gold, I can hop from universe to universe as well as star to star and era to era.

Somehow I expected McCaffrey herself to be more flamboyant; something of a weirdo even. At the Brighton Con in 1987 I strolled into a small, crowded upstairs room in the hotel where, the convention programme told me, I could not only hear her reading from her own work but also see her being filmed for a TV documentary. The programme suggested the audience would also be filmed and that we should strive to look the part; people wearing fire lizards especially welcome. Since, apart from the two dressed as crewgirls from the Enterprise and the chap in the cloak, I had not so far seen anyone in the fabled costumes these cons are supposed to attract, I went along. At least eccentrics

with stuffed toy dragons perched on their shoulders would be something to tell them about back at work.

McCaffrey was reading from *The Ship Who Sang*, her pleasant voice and neat appearance quite unremarkable. Hemmed in at the back, I couldn't see much of the rest of the crowd but I didn't spot any fire lizards and the awful truth gradually dawned on me that I wasn't going to see any weirdoes and eccentrics; that enjoying McCaffrey's work isn't some kind of aberration even if you are thirtysomething. Maybe there would, when it came to the crunch, be more takers for that lift in Gay Deceiver than I had thought.

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*Note: since the above piece was written, Anne McCaffrey's latest "Dragon" novel, Renegades of Pern, has appeared in the USA. It is forthcoming in Britain from Bantam Press in April 1990.*

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## Mutant Popcorn

### Film reviews by Nick Lowe

First of all, I'd just like to protest on all our behalf at the wanton and philistine destruction of the world's one half-decent alternate reality. Millions of people devote forty years to history's one controlled political experiment (scoop a neat line down the middle of the agar dish, smear socialism on one side and capitalism on the other), and suddenly the bacteria decide they want to close the lab down. I was in Alexanderplatz in October 1989, when it still looked as though we'd had our ration of history for one decade, and like many before me I couldn't help thinking how incredibly, really tears-in-eyes beautiful the whole thing was. I don't mean just the wall with its culture-shock graffiti ("Don't worry DDR! Baldrick has a cunning plan"), or the Stalkeresque puddlescape of no-man's-land, but all the subtly alien production design with the funny cars and smell and vaguely naff clothes, like taking a U-Bahn straight into *Watchmen*. We should have done more of these, not fewer: thrown a wall across every western city, with the nice half given over to

museums dedicated to socialist histories of the universe, and the half that looks like Ealing Broadway full of movie houses showing Steve Reeves all-nighters. But the chance has gone. It's like the end of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, where the faery authorities open their borders and send an optical sparkle-effect sweeping over the fields we know, and the real world is absorbed into just another twinkly province of never-never-land.

Well, they'll find out. On Kürfürstendamm this Christmas, they're probably too busy spending their currency handouts on cycle shorts and Gloria Estefan to afford to go to the season's pictures. But when they do turn from consuming material goods to consuming images, they'll learn too late the truth about this happy world of Elfland: that we and all our world are property, mere transient manifestations of a ruthless nonhuman lifeform that controls our every thought. Self-replicating, voraciously competitive, it lets us believe we're thinking, creative agents of free will, but it's all just emergent projections of the selfish

buck. If there's one thing we learned in that gruesomely fascinating decade just past, it's that money isn't made by films, or by people, but by money. At bottom, a movie is neither art nor fun; it's just a dollar's way of making another dollar.

So as predicted by classical Darwinian economics, the films that breed best as the ones that compete most successfully for the limited resources in punters' pockets, and pass their competitive advantage on to their offspring. It's not surprising, then, the two most successful cash-siphons in the UK this Christmas were efficient sequels to past Christmases' hits, one of which has even managed to breed twins. But in so many ways **Back to the Future Part II** deserves it anyhow, because for all its disavowal of pretension this is actually a film of such ambition, novelty, and complexity that it's impressive it could get made even on the back of its barnstorming precursor.

Part II is only cousin to the original in superficial respect of its characters and setup. But everything that makes



it run is new, and a lot of it is sophisticated and demanding far beyond what you'd normally expect from a seasonal blockbuster. The first film was carried above all by two elements in which this sequel wisely has not the slightest interest, and which combine to make the original now look surprisingly, not to say ironically, dated. For one, it was retro about style and culture in a very eighties sort of way, with most of the favourite jokes coming out of the clash of teen cultures from two great American decades, and reflecting a nostalgic interest in the fifties that already seems as kitschily passé as particle-beam weapons (can anyone remember how they were supposed to work?). And even worse, it was full of nicely-played character comedy from then-rising stars, with squeaky subtexts on great eighties themes like assertiveness and the nuclear family.

Not so *II*. This extraordinary sequel virtually expunges all characterization, significantly barring only the toony Doc and Biff. Crispin Glover was wise to jump boat, since this is no longer a film for the likes of him—as witness the fate meted out to poor Lea Thompson, reduced to hamming around in a latex cleavage. Neither is this a film for teen romance, which passes conveniently out on a backporch sofa as soon as the real fun starts, or for the virtues of sensitive macho and how a well-aimed swipe can change your destiny from abject American failure to perfect American role-model papa. Here, and even more in the forthcoming *Part III*, Michael J. has to learn not to stand up for himself when called out by ruffians. As for the leisurely lifestyle jokes about fifties culture, *Part II* has no time for such stuff; there's a few rather weak gags early on about future life, but soon we sensibly abandon both the jokes and the future for the real business, which is nothing much to do with either.

For this is a real, hundred-up authentic and uncompromised time-paradox story on film: something that so self-evidently couldn't be done that the few attempts to date have either stuck with the familiar single loop or, like *Millennium*, died trying to break out of it. And, in a way, it couldn't. The only way *Back to the Future Part II* has managed to accommodate the necessary convolutions of plot in an intelligible way is to teleport vast chunks of it into the audience's own past and future. The fifties bit cheekily takes it for granted you've seen the first film enough times to remember it shot-for-shot, while the resolution of dangly bits like Marty's accident and the identity of Biff's gran is merely promised in a message from the future (what lesser films might call a "trailer") tacked on at the end. Despite all the protestations, I can't believe the extraordinary decision to make two sequels back-to-



Michael J. Fox in 'Back to the Future II'

back was made by anything more purposeful than the overambitious script bursting its banks.

So what we have here, straight up, is a film with a plot, which is just as well as there isn't much room for anything else. It's hard to think of a fantasy film (bar maybe *Dune*) that's made comparable demands on its audience's power to process essential narrative information at speed; nor, indeed, one that finds it necessary to draw a map of the plot on a blackboard to guide them through. It's pretty mechanical and McGuffin-driven, but it's still new ground for the cinema, and much of the buzz comes from the sheer daring of the attempt, the intoxication of having to catch all the clues on the hop before attention span blinks and we're on to the next hump of the rollercoaster. The major flaw, of course, is the leakage of tension in the last twenty minutes as it gradually dawns that few of the major goals will be achieved in this instalment; and it'll be a further

disappointment if *Part III*, as seems likely, has its hands so full of loose ends from this one that it can't spring any comparable twists of its own. But that's in the future, and by then this film'll be history. At present, the future looks good.

Still, I keep wondering how these films would look if I'd just chugged in from the cold in my stylish wee Trabant. *Future II* presents an odd view of western aspirations (the highest callings are sf writer and rock'n'roll axe hero), but a satisfactorily intelligible moral about the pursuit of individual competitive gain at the expense of the community leading to corporate corruption, drug abuse, bad heavy metal, and bikers. But what's to be made of *Ghostbusters II*? What on earth would a new arrival from the real world make of writer Aykroyd's astonishing trademark style of comic potlatch, in which enormously expensive displays of effects and destruction



are blown away on jokes that really aren't terribly funny? What can possibly be made of a film that *throws away* an idea like a mink coat coming to life in a mass of vicious little snapping heads trying to eat the owner alive? What, above all, would anyone make of a finale in which a bumbling but evil East European villain is trounced by the Statue of Liberty ("something pure...") brought to life by the magic of western r'n'b? Oh, your wonderful capitalist sense of irony! And this river of slime flowing beneath the city streets, and growing arms to pull Mr Aykroyd under and bubbling up unwanted through the cracks in the pavements – this is allegory of History, yes? How clever! Back home, you understand, the deconstruction of popular icons is only permitted under Party control, in state-run semiology clubs with four-year waiting lists...

Well, the *Ghostbusters* films are for sure a breed apart. Their achievement, I suppose, is to come up with a formula that makes horror completely safe and unfrightening. The monsters are cute, all nursery colours (even the slime is candyfloss pink) and marshmallow textures, while the incarnation of absolute evil is here embodied in an atrocious painting of a scowling foreigner who steals babies. Scary, huh? And to show how daring they all are, they

make jokes about their own merchandising and the relationship between Original, New, and Real. Meanwhile, the concept and characters are as dumb as ever, and each flimsy gag costs about the annual GNP of Burkino Faso – though around half of them still fall so flat that even a holiday matinée audience just grunts "hnuh" and "heh?" All the same, I expect it does better here than in the States, because it's much more of a Christmas film than a summer one: not too fast, not too bright, not too hard, with the same mix of nostalgic sentiment, childishness, and tacky commercialism as the feast itself. And afterwards, you feel like you've just sat in front of the TV for a week pigging out on junk.

**B**ut of course there are original films around. In *Leviathan*, for instance, the director of *Rambo* and *Cobra* brings us a startling tale of a team of deep-ocean miners trapped in their seafloor station by a nameless indestructible terror from the depths – wait, no, come back, it's completely different, honest. This one, for a start, has Peter Weller as an American renaissance man, a research geologist who reads *The One Minute Manager* on camera and pumps rock with the guys when the quota looks in doubt. No? Well, it also has Amanda Pays as an entirely unex-

plained English astronaut, Meg Foster as a vampiric financier whose power videoconferencing tactic is to point her remote control right at you and press, and Richard Crenna as, well, the Richard Crenna character. And the nameless indestructible terror is neither killer shrimp nor tinkerbelle alien, but a pesky commie virus planted in the vodka on a scuttled Soviet ship ("wait! this video – it's the captain's log!") which turns all the drinking members of the crew into undead vampire fish monsters. Suspense is ingeniously maintained in this one by the early elimination of all the remotely feasible means of escape to the surface, leaving the innocent viewer to speculate agreeably on which completely impossible means will actually be used, not to mention how Foster's going to get her comeuppance when she's in New York and everyone else is at the bottom of the Atlantic. And if you have trouble remembering the difference between the endings of *Leviathan* and *Deep Star Six*, just remember *Leviathan's* the one with the textbook shark attack sequence to leaven the fun.

The simplest way to define *Leviathan* is to say that it's neither as taut as the good bits of *The Abyss* nor as silly as *Deep Star Six*, while missing the former's pretensions to grandeur



From 'Leviathan' (20th Century Fox)



and the latter's inane plot googlies. It's also a load more shameless than either, with much more blatant *Alien* lifts than its rivals – from slime drips from the ceiling to an actual no-blushes parasite-busting-out-the-tummy sequence. Much of the direction and editing is pretty slipshod, and it's surprising the writers of *Blade Runner* and *Die Hard* couldn't scratch better than this, but *Leviathan* manages a certain ungainly charm from its improbable cast and unembarrassable appetite for cliché. A year ago, after all, this genre didn't even exist; now, you can almost chant the dialogue along with the cast. ("Thank God we'll be out of this place in three days," &c.). All the same, I think that's enough to be going on with. I don't envy Fox, who seem to have lumbered themselves with distributing all three (and presumably opted to launch *Deep Star* and *Leviathan* on the wake of *The Abyss*, whence the rescheduling of their releases in descending order of quality). Direct-to-video for *Lords of the Deep*, one hopes, and if the market's still saturated, who knows? perhaps by then they'll be able to export it to Prague. Those lucky reds, they don't know what freedom is.

(Nick Lowe)

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# Lucius Shepard

## Interview by Wendy Council

Lucius Shepard is one of the major science-fiction writers to emerge in the past ten years. His books include the novels *Green Eyes* (1984) and *Life During Wartime* (1987), and a short story collection, *The Jaguar Hunter* (1987). Shepard has received enormous critical acclaim both inside and outside the sf community; has been nominated for many awards; and won the 1985 John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, a Nebula Award for his novella "R & R" and a World Fantasy Award for *The Jaguar Hunter*.

He recently finished work on a new novel, *The End of Life As We Know It*. The novel's central character, Michael, becomes part of a group of survivalists, whom Shepard terms "Kung Fu Hillbillies." Michael, adept in electronics, successfully fakes radio broadcasts of a nuclear apocalypse, then is forced to escape with the survivalists to their mountain hideaway for the following winter. Everyone but Michael believes that World War III has indeed happened, and the remainder of the novel focuses on the interactions of a large cast of characters.

Shepard was born in Lynchburg, Virginia and currently lives in Massachusetts. He has travelled extensively in Latin America, Europe and Asia.

**I want you to talk a bit about your childhood, about how you were pushed towards being a writer by your father.**

I started reading when I was three years old; my father taught me. By the time I was six, I had graduated very quickly to reading Shakespeare plays and we were acting them out together. It was fun, except he kind of got heavy about it when I failed. He got into beating me if I didn't remember it right. So I had to memorize all this crap. What I was reading up to the age of fourteen or so was Keats, Shelley, Milton, Thackeray, with a lot of the Greek histories and Greek plays—Sophocles, Aristophanes. So I was well grounded in the classics by the time I was thirteen or fourteen years old.

**But you didn't start writing fiction until your thirties?**

I was writing as a child; I was being forced to write by my father. When I was eight years old, I won an international story competition for Collins

Magazine in England. It was part of the Collins Publishing Group, and it's odd that now my publisher in England is Grafton Books, which is also a member of Collins Publishing Group, so it's come full circle. My father pushed me into writing. They were mostly dippy little stories, but the language was better than most eight-year-olds could cover, so I did write as a child. But then I got sick of the beatings, and when I got big enough to push my father around I stopped reading or writing and entered into rock and roll and other thuggish behaviour.

**And you did some poetry in your twenties that was published in literary magazines.**

Yeah, I did poetry, though I'm not proud of it. Some of it was published, but it's not that good.

**Then you really didn't write again until you applied to Clarion, the sf writers' workshop, in 1980?**

I wrote half a story as my submission story. It would have been a novelette if I had finished it, but I never felt compelled to. I wrote a couple of stories at Clarion—two whole stories and a bunch of fragments, one of which became the "Dragon Griaule" stories. **I had no idea it was that old a piece!** The idea itself is. That's what I tell people when I teach Clarion, to try and generate ideas, become a little factory. It may seem like you're just coming up with crud, but if you keep doing it, just like if you keep doing anything, generally your ideation starts improving, and you'll start coming up with ideas that are not only intriguing to you but maybe have some commercial potential as well. The dragon was the product of one of those sessions where I was sitting in my room kind of brainstorming, usually behind some substance, and just thinking about different things I could write about.

**Did you put it aside and then come across the idea later?**

No. "The Man Who Painted the Dragon Griaule" was published in 1984, so I sold it in the early part of '83. I originally thought of doing it as a novel, but at that point in my career I wasn't ready to write a 700-page novel, so I did it as sort of a compressed novel.

**The first novel you wrote was...?**

*Green Eyes*. I had sent Terry Carr a

story for *Universe*, "Black Coral," which is full of curse words. He didn't think he could use it, though he liked the story a lot, because it had too much profanity and sexuality in it. Since *Universe* depended upon library sales, Doubleday just wouldn't let that happen. He passed it along to Marta Randall, who bought it for *New Dimensions*, and *New Dimensions* thereupon tubed, so it didn't get published for a while. It did eventually get published in *Universe*, but I cleaned it up a little bit. Terry didn't think it was possible, but I showed him it was.

But while that was all going on, he was putting together the *Ace Specials*, and asked me if I had a novel. And I said yes, which was a lie. So he said, "Can you let me see it?" and I said, "I'll be happy to when I finish it," which was another lie, because I didn't even know what the hell I was going to write a novel about. He said, "Well, I'm buying really fast, I've already bought three books and I need something, so can you send me three chapters and an outline?" I had a story that I'd written at Clarion called "Green Eyes" about dead people, and so I wrote out three chapters and an outline real fast, stuck it in the mail, and then realized it was awful. So I rewrote it, called him up and told him, "Don't read the first one" and sent the second one off, realized it was awful, said, "Hang on, don't read the second one either." Finally the third one arrived and he called me back and said, "Yeah, do it, but I want you to cut out half of the metaphorical constructions that you're using." So he bought it.

**Currently you're working on *The End of Life As We Know It*, a novel unrelated to the story of the same name.**

Yeah, *The End of Life As We Know It* and another novel which is taking the "Dragon Griaule" stories and adding a fourth novella and making them into a book, then I'm going on to these two other books.

**How about the rock and roll novel I've heard about?**

That's one of them. I've written a partial draft.

**Will the songs you've written be a part of the book?**

That's a fantasy of mine. I'm going to write the charts and the lyrics, and I'd



like to have an appendix in back where I put all the songs in case anyone wants to make a movie, there's the music. Then maybe I'll get back into rock and roll backwards, the hind way, because I still like it.

**You'd like to get back into the music scene?**

Well, I wouldn't want to perform or anything, I'm not exactly into going through all that craziness again. If there was a possibility of recording the songs, of having someone else do them, that would be great. I think they're pretty good songs.

**You performed and wrote music in the 70s in the Detroit area. Did any of your bands ever hit big?**

No, but we could have, very easily. The best bands I had were getting record company interest, and then something would happen to fuck it up. One thing I've found with musicians, is that you can run into a musician anywhere in the world and tell each other the same stories for hours. Everybody has the same problems with bands – it's girlfriends, or it's personal hassles, ego trips, where somebody thinks somebody else is getting too much power in a band; it's real heavy bullshit. It's a petty industry and a petty game. Rock and roll is an interesting phenomenon. At once it's both an integral, passionate, powerful element of American society and it's also a really shallow and petty kind of thing. It's misused and abused, its potential is never realized as an art form. It's garbage music, as even people who play it will announce to you, but it has more potential than it's allowed to have, both by the record companies and by the personalities of those who play it.

But even more than powerful...I always believed I was playing the devil's music. Not in the sense of really Satanic, but I used to stand at the front of the stage – especially during the 70s – and look down and I'd see some little girl, fourteen years old dancing in front of me with her eyes rolled back in her head, drugged to the gills. Then you'd go into the bathroom, and there'd be people lying there, passed out in a half-inch of piss, and I realized I wasn't really elevating their spirits, y'know. (Laughs) Like the Church of Carnal Misbehaviour. It was like a church. Every night this band comes into your town and plays at some armpit bar, all the bimbos and the guys get together and they put on their ten-years-out-of-date hair styles and blue jeans and they go through this little mating ritual. It has almost a litany of its own, a formality. It did seem to me almost a quasi-religion.

**Is the novel about that aspect of music?**

Well, yeah, it's about a lot of that. There are two plots. One is a woman who's a very successful rock and roll singer. She's been thrown out of her house when she was sixteen for being pregnant

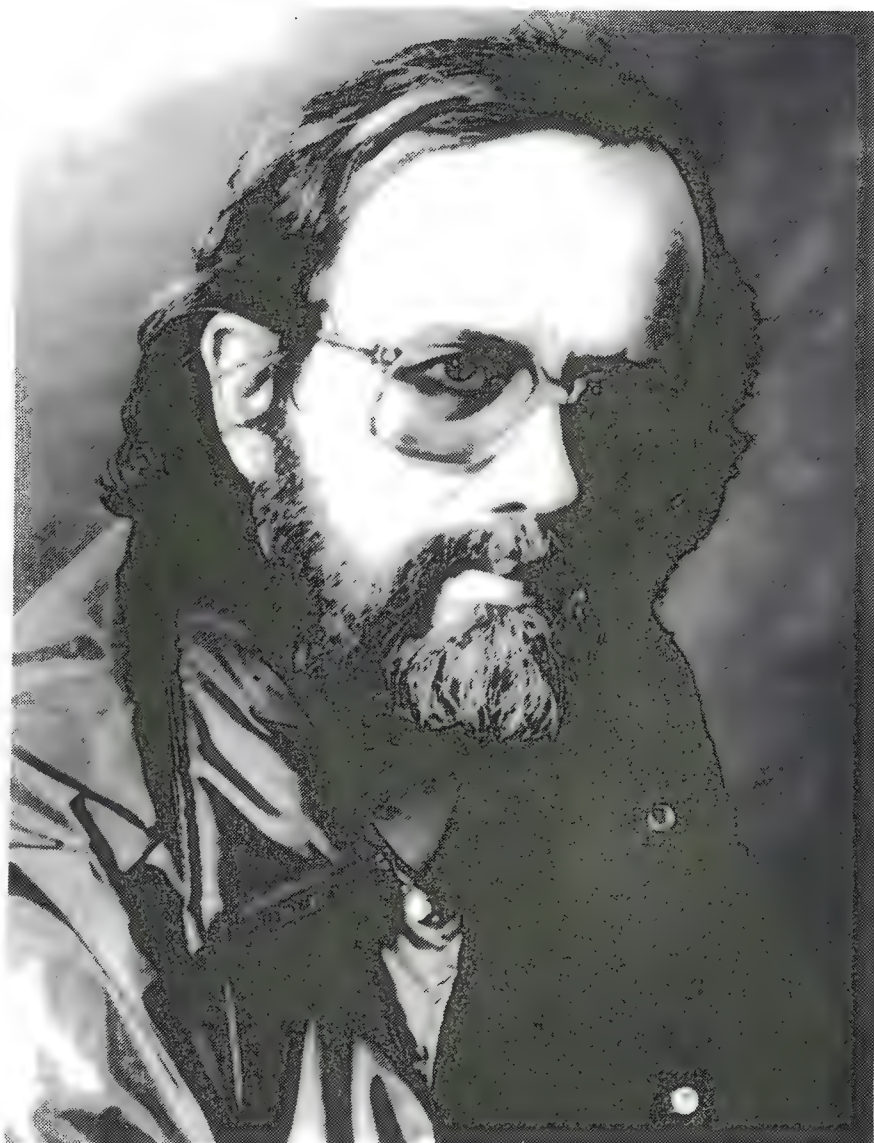


Photo of Lucius Shepard by Jim Kalett

by her father, who is a rancher from Montana, he isn't a very tolerant sort. Eight years previous to that her mother had ran away with another man, so she hadn't had much of a home life. One might say this could be a *leit motif* of some of my work. She's coming back at the age of thirty, very successful. Her father has died and she's back to settle and stay, and she comes back to this little town in Montana and finds that her mother has moved back into the house. What follows is a strange reconciliation between the mother and the daughter which involves her mother telling the daughter stories about her life which are at first intended to shock and hurt, but as things become more resolved between them, she shows another side of how she has come to be who she is now. Of course there are other sub-plots rolling around that, like people are trying to get her to come back and record, and she takes a lover, a hopeless, stupid cowboy who gets all caught up with her, but to her he's just a lay.

The other plot is this man who has been in a nut house since the age of

about ten for killing his sister, and he's now about twenty-six. And in there he learned to become a rock and roll musician, and has become good enough to where he's had a couple of albums put out. There's a lot around this about whether the record company is taking advantage of him because he's a nut. They're using this as kind of shock value, a geek recording, like Wild Man Fisher. Because the guy is not particularly the greatest rock and roller in the world. And he always thought the woman rocker was the best. He has sent her some tapes, though the problem is that she probably has never gotten the tapes, because you can't necessarily get things to people who are at a different level than you are. He's frustrated by this and he wants to find out. He's obsessing on her so he breaks out of the nut house to find her. He looks for her, plans to murder her. And he has his own little rock and roll adventures. That's the other plot.

There's two people. One's here and one's there. She is static, he's going across America, kind of on tour. At the end of the book one of them dies. Maybe



not how you would think, maybe not for reasons you would think. It's a real weird story.

**Is there a fantastic or fabulist or magic realism element to this, or is it straight mainstream fiction? Straight rock-and-roll fiction?**

Nothing's straight. It's not a genre novel. No way in hell is it a genre novel. But whether there are distortions of reality in there, I would say yes. Especially since we're talking about a crazy guy.

**What's the second novel that you have planned after that?**

The big novel. I want to try and do the Borneo novel, which is a vampire novel. When I started writing the "Dragon Griaule" stories I hated dragon stories. My mission was to find a way to write about a dragon that I could deal with. What I ended up with was what I like to think of as this big republican dragon. It lies there; it is a domain unto itself. It has all these American virtues like manifest destiny. I thought it was kind of a neat idea, to have this big paralytic dragon sitting there thinking evil thoughts, vibing out evil. So that made dragons as a sub-genre accessible to my kind of approach to writing. I wanted to write a vampire novel, but I don't like vampires for the same reason I don't like dragons — they're too clichéd. I had to find a totally new way to look at them.

This is a story that's about a vampire colony or extended family. They've been in Borneo for several hundred years and have a very stable culture. Around them the culture of Borneo is in dissolution. Borneo is, right now, going through a whole lot of changes — the Dyaks are coming out of the jungle, the Japanese are logging it, Australian companies, Americans and Arabs are buying oil rights, it's a whole cultural meltdown that's going on there, so I have a stable society set against a chaotic society and I like that. I want to play those two things off each other.

**You're travelling to Borneo next year for three or four months?**

At least two months — however long it takes. It depends on how hard it is to get to certain places. I'll be in the area called Kalimantan, south and central Borneo. Then up the Mahakam River into the interior.

**And you'll do what? Research? Live?** Research for me isn't going to libraries. It's hanging out. I don't take cameras. I take a notebook and write down a few things. Fiction is an incomplete form of life, so if I were to take videos or photos, I would obviate the need to write anything. I've always found it sharpens my impressions and memory of a place to go without a camera, with as little equipment as possible, because all that other stuff gets in the way of your perceptions. It records things for you so that you don't have

to think about them, you don't have to feel them.

**Can you come back and write about that right away, or will you need to let it percolate somewhat?**

I've been to the third world before, so I know what it's like. I've been to Southeast Asia. It's not as if it's entirely a new experience. I've been in the coastal towns, I've been in cities that have waterways instead of streets, like Bangkok. I've been in Muslim communities in Southeast Asia, I know what it smells like. It's not as if I'm going to have to start from scratch with this.

**Certainly the travelling you've done has been important to the body of work that you've produced so far...**

Yeah, and I'm not saying I wouldn't need to travel for this book. I think it would be better if I went. It's just a matter of real specifics to ground myself, like what's that restaurant in Bandjarmasin called? What kind of cigarettes were they selling? Just getting those little points down, which may not seem real important, but they work for me. They start giving me little places I can tie off a scene, like if I remember a specific restaurant or a specific thing... it's like having a little memory trick, a mnemonic.

**I've seen a couple of your draft chapters of *The End of Life As We Know It*, and though I like your other work, I think this is the finest thing you've done, just wonderful. You suggested that you recently had made some kind of quantum jump?**

I think within the last year I have. Writing *The End of Life As We Know It* has been a very difficult thing for me because it was a very personal book in some ways. Although none of the things in the book have happened to me, the main character in the book is very close to someone I used to be.

**This is the street kid?**

Yes, the character Michael. I describe him at one point as someone who has a terrible self-image. He thinks he's scum, he's filth, that he's a worthless person. Yet at the same time, he's arrogant enough to think he's smart enough to fool people into thinking he's a worthwhile person. It's a peculiar mixture of arrogance and low self-esteem that fuels him, which is very typical of street kids. They all think they're worthless because they've been beaten or raped, yet they've been out on the streets, so they think they have at least this edge, in that they can con anybody, they can hustle. So the character is sort of like I was.

In writing it, I first was trying to write it in the first person, and it wasn't working. And it should have worked. I couldn't figure out why the hell it didn't work, because I wanted this guy's interiorizations to have a lot of personal impact. It was just coming off too damned cutesy, too precious. I tried

third person, and it wasn't working there. It was too stiff and distant. So I came up with this kind of real intimate third person style. It has something almost like stream of consciousness in parts, not in the Joycean sense, but it just drops into it. It's almost a point of view shift within the narration, it almost goes from third to first person, back and forth, but the slide is pretty slick, it's not clunky. I think that was a big step for me. And just all of a sudden, I was writing at a different level. I think it was that the materials of the novel were so different that it demanded that I come up with a new level of writing.

**How so?**

What I'd been writing before was in a certain spectrum. This is an interiorized novel, and yet it has to be funny and it has to be tough, and it has to do a lot of things. It's a much more complex work than anything I had ever done before. The character, Michael, was much more complex, intricate, much more voluble, and fluent in a strange way. He demanded a level of expression that I hadn't previously succeeded in getting, so I had to get better.

The plot of the story is much more demanding. There are so many characters in the book, and I had to do what I've always done before, which is write good setting and so forth — those are my strong points — but I also had to bring the other parts of my game up. It was like I was a tennis player with great groundstrokes, but not much in the way of a serve-and-volley game, and that was the dialogue, the complexity of certain scenes.

And I've said to the people that I've taught, nobody who is learning to write should get discouraged because they're not getting any better, because that's the way people do get better, they get better all of a sudden. They get better in quantum leaps, instead of slowly, steadily, every day they're just a teenie bit better. It just seems to happen, one day you write a story which is markedly better than anything you've done prior.

**And "Black Coral" was such a story for you, and then again this novel?**

Definitely. And this isn't unique to me, there's a lot of writers who have gone through pretty much the same basic experience. I tend to think that's one of the few verities about writing that I know.

**Bantam, your U.S. publisher until now, made the decision to market your books as mainstream, not as science fiction. Do you care either way about that decision?**

I think it's a good idea; it expands the audience. The people who read me in science fiction, are going to desert me if I write not-science fiction, so what this does is expand my audience. I'm not writing for the people who read fantasy or *Star Trek* novels.



### **Why did you start in this genre?**

My wife threw me out of the house, essentially. One of my rock bands had broken up under traumatic circumstances and I was moping around the house, real depressed, watching a lot of Christian programming on television, thinking seriously about getting down on my knees and praying to the set at one point, as I recall. It was an aberration, but scary nonetheless. I was doing this story and she suggested that I send it to this workshop—Clarion—and so I said “all right, all right,” so she got me out of there. I never came back.

### **You taught Clarion in 1987, Clarion West in 1989. Why do you teach?**

The first time it was a promise I made myself when I went to Clarion. Ego. I started out in Clarion as a workshop student and I wanted to go full circle, to come back as a teacher within ten years. And so I begged them to. I was the first person to call them and say, “Hey, I want to teach next year.”

But when I got there, I realized that it was kind of interesting, kind of neat. The first class I had, they were all looking at me all the time. They were just intent upon me. They were looking for how did you do this, how did you get to be who you are. And it was really weird, man, then I remembered looking at my teachers like that myself—everything they did I watched, thinking there might be a clue in the way they used their fork.

I thought I’d just go in and workshop the stories and play it by ear. As it happened, I got into doing a lot of line editing, and I was good in the individual conferences, because I would push them and find out what the hell they were trying to do. I was feeling my way, but I found it exciting because I learned I actually knew something about writing, which I hadn’t known until then. I consider myself an intuitive writer. I don’t do a lot of thinking about it, I just do a lot of writing. I was surprised to find out how much I did know. I still don’t use it on my own work. I sit at the typewriter and all that stuff goes away. I still have my own problems.

It’s also nice to be able to do the same thing somebody did for me. So in a way it’s semi-altruistic, but in another way it’s good for me, because it re-energizes me, even though I have to catch up on my sleep for a week afterwards. It makes me more engaged in the community, in the spectrum of activity. I wouldn’t mind doing it every couple of years.

### **Do you still write twelve hours each day?**

Right now, yes, I’m working that way. I write from seven probably through until five, take a break, then do a couple more hours.

### **You work on about three things at once. Are they at different levels of completion?**

Yeah. It’s good to have a couple of things going. You get stale on one thing, and if something starts happening with another thing, you just dump the first and come back to it in a couple of days. It’s just the way I do things. It’s not advice to writers or anything. I do think there is something to the fact that you can work longer hours by working on more than one thing. You start wearing out on something after four or five hours, and if you switch over to something else, you attack it differently, you approach it with a fresher point of view, so you won’t be as mentally fatigued.

### **I’m sure it helps when you’re in the middle of a big novel that takes up a year or more to be able to switch to a short story occasionally.**

Writing a novel is like having a bad marriage. It really is. Because you write along, and everything is going good at first. The honeymoon. Then you take her home, bring her over the threshold, set up house. You go along for about a year. Then you have your first affair. Because you’re getting a little tired of it. And here comes this cute little short story walking down the street in a short skirt and you say, “Hey, what could it hurt?” And that’s what happens. Now the trouble is that sometimes this leads to the Casanova kind of sickness, and you start going after all kinds of short stories. But if you just limit yourself to one-night stands then you’re all right, you can go back to the book. I think that’s a pretty fair analogy for how I feel about novels. You have to break from them once in a while. At least I do. In a way, though, you don’t really ever break. It’s not like you fall in love with the short story and forget all about the wife and the home, you just keep it in the back of your mind and turn down the flame a little bit.

And sometimes, of course, there’s brain lock. If you work all these days in a row putting in ten or twelve hours, one morning you’ll just sit down and turn on the computer and nothing happens. It’s like the power’s off inside your head. Those days I’ve learned that you don’t just sit there, you turn the damn thing off and go for a walk. I have one of those days once every three or four months. It’s not like “I don’t feel like writing today,” it’s just I sit down and there’s nothing in my head. There’s not word one. It’s eerie.

### **Your literary vision is really dark. Yet you aren’t a dark person.**

Well, yes I am. I mean, I don’t insist that we all sit around and wear black hoods and chant, and I like people. I think all people I’ve met are absolute lunatics deep down, but I still like them. And I can’t help but hope there’s room for improvement in us all. I just have a dark view of human nature, but I don’t think it’s an absolutely fixed view. I’m reporting what I see. Obviously I have hope; if I were devoid of

hope, I’d be writing stories about guys who push stones up hills. I don’t think I write those kind of stories.

### **No, there’s an underlying light. From my reading of your stories, you seem to even believe, at times, that love can conquer all.**

I don’t know if I believe that. Love can certainly fuck up all. I believe in possibility. I believe in specifics, not in generalizations. I believe that two people can be together and do something. That doesn’t mean that love is going to conquer all, it just means that it might sustain them against some terrible thing for a while. And that’s good enough.

When I say things that lead one to believe that I’m looking at human nature as pretty much a terrible, horrible, puny, sickly kind of thing, it doesn’t mean that I think necessarily it has to be that way, I just think that generally it seems to be that way. There’s always exceptions, there are always people with surprises. Some day I’d like to write a book about a man or a woman who exceeds my expectations. That day may be coming. I probably will. But right now I don’t think I’ve exceeded my expectations, so it’s hard for me to do that. If I look around long enough, maybe I’ll be able to cover it a little better. I’m probably like my character in *The End of Life As We Know It*, still a dose of low self-esteem. **Low self-esteem just personally, or professionally, too? Do you also not think you’re a good writer?**

Beth Meacham at Tor once said that I was a very peculiar mixture of arrogance and humility; that comes from my days as Michael. I pretty much know where I’m at. I know I have some talent, and if I work hard, I can write something—possibly—that will exceed my expectations. And that would be good.

### **So what are your expectations of yourself as a writer? Why do you write... so that you can live beyond the grave, so that you can change the world...?**

A little bit of the last. I don’t have much hope that I can, but that’s in there. I write because it’s the only thing I know how to do. It’s hard for me to unravel all the threads.

Obviously I was programmed to write to a certain extent by my father. The reason I want to write is because of who I was for thirty-three years before I started and everything that happened to me. That may be begging the question to some extent, but really it’s not. I think people who write are not born to write or anything like that, it’s a matter of exertion and discipline most of all, more than talent; but I had a perfect life for a writer. I was given a tremendous grounding in classical literature and language, I had a good vocabulary. And because of the manner in which it was drummed into me, I was driven to explore, to run around



the world and have lots of adventures and meet lots of people, so I ended up in my early thirties with a lot of stories to tell. And some competency. It was a fortuitous circumstance.

And I want to write because I love doing it and feel I'm good at it and think I can be better. I'm excited by the prospect of getting better.

**In the Michael Bishop introduction to *The Jaguar Hunter* and in other places – a John Shirley review in *Science Fiction Eye* – you're pointed to as one of the few people in the field who can do both style and content.**

I don't know if I agree with it, but yeah, that's been said. A lot of American short fiction now is about something that almost happens. They're not-quite stories. They're stories about things that may happen or can't happen or want to happen; they're attempting to be very elusive. Some would call them artsy fartsy, but I think they're valid things. I also think they're incomplete kinds of visions.

But I believe in the tale. I don't think you have to have surprise endings and shit like that, but I think really good stories are tales. They don't have to be heavily structured tales, with plot and conflict in the way they lay out on the board in beginning writing classes, but they do have to have a momentum and an energy and a specificity of purpose that is an engine in the narrative. I think some of Richard Ford's stories have that and some of Patrick McGrath's have the same thing, though those are two quite different writers. There are other stories I read that I don't think have that, and I think that makes them incomplete, not artful.

Alice Turner at *Playboy* explained it to me like this: she said there are a lot of talented mainstream writers, but there aren't a lot of big talents who can really do it all, who can write a story and write it beautifully and well and crafted. It's like knocking one out of the ballpark. I don't know if I'm there yet, but I think I know how to tell a story, and I think I can write well, so that gives me hope of possibly being able to hit one out of the park, of being able to be one of those writers who can be a big talent. I don't think by any stretch of the imagination that I'm one of them now. I think it's a matter of disposition as well as anything else. I don't scorn telling stories.

I don't mean you can't write a great story about some housewife in Connecticut sitting around thinking about cancer, you can do that well and powerfully, but you still have to have that engine going. I think that's what people respond to in my work. I write with a lot of passion and specificity of purpose. And I write fairly well and tell stories. And that's sort of the whole package. I think I have a chance to be a good writer. If I keep working, maybe in ten or fifteen years, I'll be pretty good.

**Who do you think is a good writer?**

I like Craig Nova's early novels, I think they're brilliant. I like Yukio Mishima, Yashar Kemal [*They Burn the Thistles*], Josef Skvorecky, all these guys I think are really great. I think John Fowles has written some marvellous things – my favourite is *The Ebony Tower*. I like people who are as weird as Peter Handke. I thought Don DeLillo's *Libra* was a terrific book, an amazing book, a streetwise kind of book. I don't know – Russell Banks's *Continental Drift*, Robert Stone's *A Hall of Mirrors*. In the science-fiction field, I think Thomas Disch's 334 is absolutely gorgeous.

**You've said that you don't like being compared to Gabriel García Márquez. Do you mind when people say you write magic realism? Do those kinds of labels bother you?**

I think people are looking to put labels on me, as they do for everything. I don't mind, I just don't think it's particularly accurate. I've written some things that may aspire to, or kind of slop over into, magic realism. I'm going to do a lot of different things and when I'm done, I'm not sure you're going to be able to stick a label on me. At least not one that's going to cover the product. The vampire novel is probably a magical realism book in a sense. Yet it's also not going to be, because it's not going to be devoid of explicatory kinds of things, either. Magic realism kind of sets up a logical continuum that doesn't depend on having back story; it just starts; it's like a fable. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was like a giant folk tale. My vampire novel will have elements of that, but it will also have elements of crafty structuralists like John Fowles. It's a hybrid. And the rock and roll novel is a mainstream book. *The End of Life As We Know It* is a mild fantasy, and it's a very American book – like a darker more perverse Huck Finn. **In "A Spanish Lesson" there's an overt political message in the moral that ends the story. Would you say you have a political agenda for your stories?**

I think anything I write is political. I'm not trying to preach at people – well, sometimes I am – but even in stories where I don't preach at people I'm concerned, I think, with politics. I was talking with someone the other day at an sf-convention panel about exotic cultures, and we talked about how the best thing that happens to you when you travel someplace that is exotic and very strange is that you turn around and look at your own country and you see it as being very exotic and strange. You see it devoid of all the scales you have over your eyes when you're insulated by it.

When I turn back and look at America from afar, I see a place that's a huge, vast, sluggish thing; it's very unhealthy, full of flickering sick lights, teeming with not much vital energy or purpose, a parasitic growth. I find that appalling.

That a country that has this kind of wealth and power is so full of people and institutions that are so self-absorbed and have no real thought other than for the immediate gratification of profit or pleasure. And that's not saying that I'm a Puritan, it's just saying that in times like these, to be so is immoral.

I feel so. Because you're talking about the death of millions of people due to famine, you've got all kinds of political struggle. Everybody, for instance, knows about Idi Amin, but not too many people are aware that his successor killed more people than Idi Amin, and even fewer people are aware that their successor killed more than the two of them put together. There are genocides, all kinds of grave, terrible things happening in the world, and we know nothing of them. America is a country that is insulated from much painful reality. I feel that time is coming to an end. The quality of life in this country is going to slip and slip. And we've got to get our act together. And you can't say, well, we're going to be good, we're going to get our act together here and keep our own house in order without addressing the problems in the rest of the world, because it's all interconnected. I think this country is run by third-rate stupid fucks who probably deserve to be slaughtered. What has to happen in the 1990s is that people in America have to begin to wield their power as they have not needed to since 1776, and really exert a fierce, moral pressure on the leaders and start things turning around, or else it's going to be too damned late.

**You see that you have a role in that change?**

That's my point. I can't write anything that's not going to address this in some way. I would be a damned fool if I didn't, because it's the most important thing in the world. You get people off their asses, perturb them, even if it doesn't make them happy, even if it's not absolutely gratifying. I get a lot of mail that says, "We like your work, but we wish you'd stop these political stories." I love that reaction. That's exactly the kind of reaction I want. I'm making somebody shift uneasily in their chair. Nobody complains that another science-fiction author has written twenty-five novels about a god-damned glorified military group, these right-wing manifest destiny slugs, which was the expression of a post-war America after World War II – anything a man wants, he just goes and gets. This isn't that time any more, this is a different time completely. And if my five or six little stories about Central America make people uncomfortable enough to write a letter and yet still say they like it even though they're complaining about it, then I'm doing something right, and I think it's a good thing. So yeah, I like to keep annoying people if I can.



# Participative Fiction

## Charles Platt

The familiar landscape of the top level of your file system lies ahead. In the foreground, on a grassy green meadow, are variously sized, coloured, and shaped boulders labeled "Budget," "Drawings," "Games," and so on. In the fog-shrouded distance are large hills emblazoned "Oxford English Dictionary" and "Encyclopedia Britannica." Two knocks on the "Space" boulder cause it to expand and to open a portal in its side. What might be taken for an asteroid belt is visible through the portal. One of the rocks floating in the blackness is labeled "Skyhooks." You drift up to it, knock twice, and enter. A pretty blue and white earth, and some less pretty bits of variously shaped debris, greet you. This is an unfinished project, and some of your less successful experiments have yet to be laid to rest.

The above paragraph is not science fiction. It's a prediction of what an engineer might experience as he begins his day's work, hooked up to a computer that projects a three-dimensional scene and gives him the illusion of interacting with it physically.

The excerpt is from *Mind Children* by Hans Moravec, published in 1988 in the U.S. (and, I believe, in the U.K.) by Harvard University Press. It's a remarkable book, crammed with highly provocative speculative ideas. What's even more remarkable, though, is that Moravec's concept of "virtual reality" has already become feasible.

The equipment is rudimentary, but it does the job. There are two micro-TV screens that you wear over your eyes, creating the illusion of a three-dimensional landscape. Your hand slides into a semi-rigid glove lined with pressure and motion sensors. You push forward with your hand; the landscape starts to move past you. You can turn, retrace your steps, look up, look down. The computer graphics are relatively crude — certainly not up to Lucasfilm standards — but they accurately simulate the experience of being physically present in the synthetic environment.

Moreover, you can reach out and touch objects that seem to lie in front of you. Pick them up, put them down; the glove senses your movements, and

the world in front of your eyes responds accordingly.

So far, this system has been demonstrated only in prototype form. (It made its debut in September 1989 at the Hackers Conference, an invitation-only event in California unofficially showcasing state-of-the-art computer hardware and software.) It's being developed by Autodesk, who market AutoCAD, the most widely used computer-aided design software. You can see why they're interested in virtual reality: with a little more development, it will enable an architect to walk into a replica of the house he has just designed, or an engineer to verify specifications by picking up computer-generated components and fitting them together by hand.

But consider the implications when this technology is applied to entertainment. Instead of reading about other worlds, or sitting passively and watching them on a screen, you'll have the experience of visiting them and interacting with them physically.

The people at Autodesk are aware of this. Like most computer nerds, they read science fiction. Indeed, they're planning to call their product "Cyberspace" (a name derived from William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer*) despite complaints from Gibson, who isn't happy that they've trademarked the term he coined in his book.

Their prototype runs on a PC clone with an 80386 chip and a special graphics board. In other words, this isn't something that requires a supercomputer; it's being developed for the masses. Initially, this means the business masses, because only businesses (and a few demented tech freaks) will be willing to spend the \$5,000 that I imagine it will cost.

Volume, however, will bring the price down, at the same time that increasing computer power improves performance. Ten years from now, assuming the global economy doesn't crash, virtual reality should be finding some use in the home. In twenty years, I'd be very surprised if it isn't available at a price comparable to, say, a high-quality colour video monitor.

Which leads me to ask: when people can go and visit the alien world of their

choice, will anyone still be interested in reading science fiction?

The death of the novel has been prophesied so often, the subject begins to seem tiresome. The fact is, books still have many advantages that computer-driven media cannot match. You can take them anywhere, they don't need batteries, you don't have to worry about dropping them or getting them damp or dirty, you can find your place easily, and even a mere paperback has pleasing visual and tactile qualities, from its glossy colourful cover to its sharp, clear print.

One problem, though, with books: as a reader, you're not allowed to participate.

By this I mean that you are expected to surrender yourself passively to the story and follow it sequentially from beginning to end. If you try to skip around, you'll lose track of the plot. If you take a sample from the middle of the book, it may be misleading. And you certainly can't encroach upon the author's godlike status. If you don't like the way he kills off his characters at the end, there's nothing you can do about it. If you wish you could have seen more of a place that he chose to mention only briefly, you're out of luck.

Other media have become less restrictive. Television: you can skip from channel to channel, or tape a show on your VCR and edit out the bits you don't want, or flash through them in fast-forward mode. Magazines: the contents are presented in small bite-sized info-chunks, making it easy to browse and sample at will. Comics: state-of-the-art titles (if we allow that comics are a form of art) are highly impressionistic, presenting a story as a series of graphically intense fragments. You can browse through them almost as you might wander through another world. Film: modern mass-entertainment movies tend to be structured less as sequential narratives, more as mosaics of brief encounters, arresting images, verbal quips, and special effects.

If you take a reactionary view of these trends, you'll complain that modern media are pandering to an



audience that seems crippled by its diminishing attention span and wants to consume art like fast food, in short, convenient bites.

Personally, however, I see it differently. There's such a wealth of entertainment available, it seems only natural to want to browse and skip. Last night, for instance, I discovered two interesting documentaries on my American cable TV (one on channel 22, one on channel 23, from a total of 37 available channels). I could have watched one and taped the other – but I know from experience that if I tape something, I seldom get around to watching it later. So, instead, I flipped back and forth between the two channels, sampling a little of one, a little of the other.

If I had been watching conventionally structured drama instead of modern documentaries, I wouldn't have been able to make much sense of what I was seeing. This is not to say that drama, or any other "linear" art, is inferior to modern "mosaic" forms. It merely means that the modern forms are better suited to the habits of modern consumers.

Novelists, however, remain stubbornly unresponsive to these new audience habits. This is especially ridiculous in science fiction, which often concerns itself with the future yet restricts itself to narrative techniques that haven't changed substantially since the nineteenth century. Surely, if we want people to continue reading books, we have to make some adjustments (call them concessions, if you must) to suit our readers. We can't offer the responsiveness and total involvement of "virtual reality," but we can at least give readers a more active role.

One way this can be achieved is via computer software. Stuart Moulthrop, an English professor at Yale, is already writing a kind of narrative with the aid of Hypercard, a Macintosh program that allows the user to examine one screen of information (pictures and/or text) and select topics that are of interest. Each keyword or image is linked with subsidiary screens that offer additional information. Thus, when this system is applied to a work of fiction, the viewer can select characters, places, or other elements of interest, and follow a unique path among flashbacks, background, and subsequent developments.

But you don't need a computer to facilitate this. With a little thought and enterprise, a writer should surely be able to construct a novel similarly, in small segments that need not be absorbed in any particular order. There have already been experiments of this type, such as J.G. Ballard's "condensed novels," which presented slices of spacetime ("image quanta," as Ballard once called them) examining a theme

from various angles, some of them metaphorical, some of them symbolic.

These experiments with form – and others, all the way from *Finnegans Wake* to John Brunner's classic mosaic sf novel *Stand on Zanzibar* – have never led to an enduring movement or trend. Indeed, structural innovation in mass-entertainment fiction has died out almost completely in the last fifteen years.

That doesn't necessarily mean, however, there's no potential demand; it merely means that no one has taken the risk. I'd like to see a new subgenre – call it "Quantum Fiction" – of books composed of text quanta from one to three pages in length. (Kurt Vonnegut already writes novels in segments as small as this.) Readers would be able to browse through these quanta as freely as they would browse through a magazine – and techniques of magazine layout, including subheads, excerpts, graphic images, captions, and display typography, would encourage this. The prose would be focused, succinct, and modern, and the reader would be free to sample it randomly or read through it from beginning to end.

I'm not saying this would be a "superior" form of literature. Nor am I saying that it would replace all others. I merely feel that some writers should consider adapting themselves to modern reading habits, instead of complaining that the audience won't adapt itself to old-fashioned writing habits.

The novel won't die if its creators refuse to change its form. Compared with modern entertainments such as virtual reality, however, it will begin to seem increasingly old-fashioned and irrelevant, like 78 r.p.m. records or silent movies. There's still a residual audience even now for silent movies – but not many new ones are being made. I believe there should be a lesson here for people who are in the business of writing fiction.

## Special Item Received

To hand is the first number of **Journal Wired**, a quarterly magazine in book form issued by American small-press publisher Mark Ziesing (with assistance from Philip K. Dick Society stalwart Andy Watson). It should appeal to *Interzone* readers, containing as it does stimulating interviews with Iain Banks and Abbie Hoffman, fiction by A. A. Attanasio and Rudy Rucker, and articles by Lucius Shepard and John Shirley. Not specifically an sf publication, but it's devoted to the imaginative and wayward. It's a trade paperback of 128 pages, priced at \$7.95; order it from Ziesing, PO Box 76, Shingletown, CA 96088, USA.

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## Interface

Continued from page 4

pieces which have appeared in *Ambit* and elsewhere over the past decade or more. Thirteen stories in all, the oldest being "The Air Disaster" (Bananas, January 1975) and the most recent being "War Fever" (F & SF, October 1989). The new novel is, believe it or not, a sequel to his bestselling, semi-autobiographical *Empire of the Sun* (1984). He described it in a recent BBC2 television interview as "a follow-up to *Empire of the Sun*, tracing what happened when I returned to England." On the face of it, 1940s and 50s Britain doesn't sound like natural terrain for Ballard's highly imaginative brand of fiction (quite unlike the landscape of wartime China), but I for one look forward with great fascination to seeing what he makes of it...

(David Pringle)

We send our best wishes for the new decade to *Interzone's* tiny handful of readers in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania – and in the Soviet Union. (Alas, we know of none at all in East Germany or Hungary – but we're hoping.)



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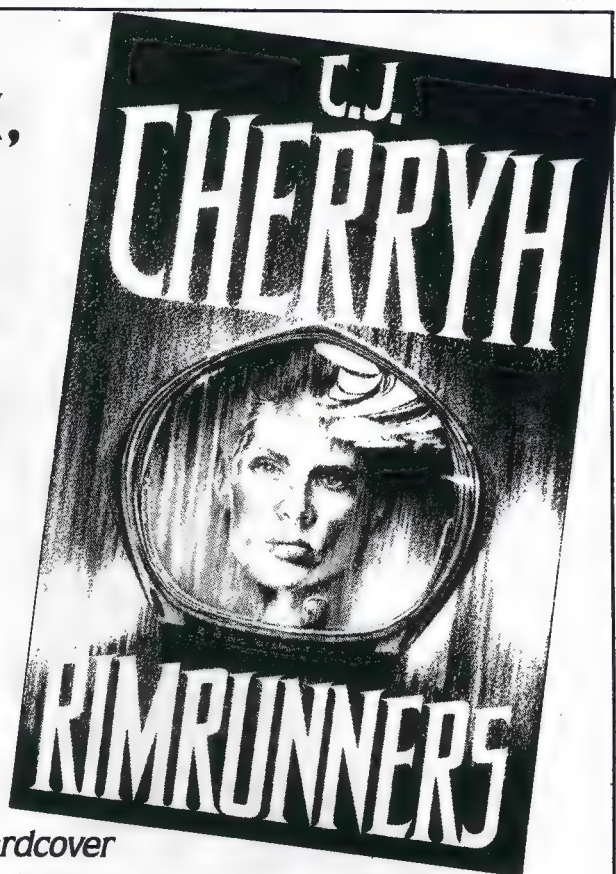
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# MEMETIC DRIFT

Glenn Grant



"13.01: A meme is not replicated by words alone. Competition between meme-complexes is becoming increasingly intense, but we have no interest in resorting to evangelism or cult-tactics to gain 'converts' [see 13.31] ... Although actions do not, in fact, speak louder than words, they are a more subtly effective transmission vector."

— A Code for Nomadiks, Version 25.0  
(annual updates available on World3 Network).

**S**tick out my thumb, and I find myself crossing the Great Midwestern Dustbowl with a flock of sun-crazed Nomadiks, generally heading in a westward direction, without plan or destination. Half the day wasted in the hard solar infall which is the only rain here, waiting for this lift. Half the night spent staring past my reflection, past sandblasted billboards and disused silos. Not a recommended therapy for anyone just pulling out of an extended period of depression. This same desert that has finally swept over my home has now settled into my mind, grain by grain filling up the cortical folds, a thin layer of insulation against unwanted emotions.

I'm riding with the Norm Famli, a polymarriage

consisting of two women, a transmale, an hermaphrodite, and two pseudochildren. All of them live in these two articulated trailer modules, carted around on the back of a mammoth surplus defence vehicle. (A GM mobile missile carrier, to be exact, auctioned off by the US military when they decommissioned the MX arsenal.)

I'm one of two hitchhikers they picked up last night in the depopulated suburbs of Regina. The other guy, who calls himself "Scred," is a wiry geezer with a missing right canine, nasty stitchmarks up one arm, and a lot of crude jokes to tell. A few of them are even funny, but for the most part it's a dull trip. Far too much time to think.

Sometime around sun-up, I notice my reflection in the window. There's a gap where my eyes should be, the shadow under the visor of my Co-op baseball cap. Only the end of my thin nose is reflected, and a twenty-year-old face that is gaunt even when I've been eating well (which I haven't), surrounded by long strands of dirty-blond hair.

Yes, I'm aware that I'm exhibiting all the symptoms





of emotional shock: apathy, indifference, inexpressive staring, the whole bit. It doesn't help to have seen it happen to others, to strangers and neighbours, and to Jodi.

Jodi had to go in for observation after her parents were killed in a tornado. A year later she was off the medication and holding up fine, until the dunes swamped the pathetic encroachment barriers out behind our rented farmhouse. By ones and twos, our housemates packed up and left. Then, with an enormous sand-drift engulfing the back porch, came the city's eviction notice, and the papers from the Resettlement Ministry, and the inevitable, final moving-day...

Eventually Jodi's aunt and uncle brought her to a hospital closer to their home in Thunder Bay. When I last saw her, a month ago, she didn't know who I was.

**“W**ant some tea with that croissant, Fifer?” Sue sets her tray down on the table in the kitchenette where Scred and I have been sitting since midnight, getting leg cramps. “Fifer – that’s your first name, is it?”

“That’s right. Fifer Stenzel. And some tea would be nice. Thanks ma’am.”

Sue Norm is a tall Asian woman, eldest of the Famli, streaks of grey in her disorderly black hair, and a few crinkles around the eyes as she laughs. “Not ma’am, please. Call me Sue. Or Yingsiu, if you prefer.” She fills the teapot carefully, compensating as the trailer rig sways around a turn.

A couple of the other Norms are having breakfast in the small living-area adjacent to the kitchen, where the TV runs a disc of a Fijian earthdub band. Forward of that are storage shelves and overhead cupboards, haphazardly decorated with posters of obscure netbands and digital Shunga paintings. Sliding doors lead onto a low tunnel to the cab, below a warning in felt-marker: *Don’t bug the driver*. Aft of the kitchen are the fresher, the shower, and the accordion-pleated passage to the second module, hung with a curtain. Famli sleeping quarters, back there.

Yingsiu pours the tea.

The first sip sets off a warning alarm, “Aw hell, this is –” then a sudden sneeze, spilling a hot mugfull onto



my lumberjack shirt, “— mint tea.”

“Oh, I am sorry.” Sue grabs a towel, passes it to me. “You’re allergic to mint?”

“And to certain trees, and cats, and —” another sneeze “— and it’s my own stupid fault for not checking first.” Next, an onslaught of three sneezes...

Scred is cackling hysterically. “You oughta be more careful, Fife.” Grinning, he returns his attention to his *Bioregional News* fax. The top headline reads: *Secessionists Bomb Edmonton Airship Terminal*. Mopping up the spilled tea, I decide that it might not be a good idea to settle here in Alberta. More jobs out in BC, anyway.

“**Y**ingsiu? Bad news from World3,” Vicki calls from a swivel chair by the vidphone. “ResetMin just revoked our permit for Finnegan. The Christas have a monastery about one klick to the east. They filed a complaint.”

“Shit. That hexes that. Left it as late as they could, didn’t they?” Sue takes the other chair and slips on a headset. “What’s the backup site, Larry?” Maps appear on the screen, the new destination and ETA in red. “Mount Cyprian? Great. We’ll have to double back. Okay, put Sal on.”

Larry, I take it, is the name of their vidphone persona, the program which handles their messages, broadcastcatching, and other databiz. Noel Norm calls it Larry the Lar, their protective household spirit. But Noel’s a Teknik Pagan (an absurd idea, in itself) and I can’t tell if she expects to be taken seriously.

On the screen, a thinly-bearded face shows up in a shuddery low-angle, flowing brown hair snaking about in the breeze from the driver’s window. This would be Sal Norm, somewhere up ahead of us in the box-van, seen from the dash camera. Sue explains the situation to Sal, who nods, jots down directions, and signs off.

Sue makes a few more calls, while Victoria removes her headset, sidles aft to the kitchen, and draws a cup of water from the dispenser. “What’s all that about?” I ask.

“A little change of plan.” She draws a felt bag out of her sweatsuit pocket, drops something blue into her palm, a capsule which she tosses back, and the water follows it. “We got word from World3 — our net, y’know — that the...uh, Resettlement Ministry won’t let us use the town of Finnegan for a little gathering we’d planned. You ever been to one of our — no, you wouldn’t have. Lotta fun, you’ll see.” She nods, rather Californian in speech and gesture, blonde split-ends swaying into her face. (I don’t know what’s in the capsules she keeps downing. Maintenance doses of something, but they have no visible effect on her at all.)

“What was wrong with Finnegan?”

“Nothin’. A ghost town. Perfect, for our purposes. But there’s these Christa Cultists nearby, seem to think we’d make lousy neighbours, so the ResetMin revoked our permit. Happens all the time, so we arrange for back-up sites.”

Another evil grin fro Scred, who’s been sitting across from me, reading something on his microbook. “You know those Christians. They used to say the Gypsies refused to shelter the Virgin and her child on the flight to Egypt, and for that they were cursed

to wander forever. Ain’t that so?”

Vicki blows hair from her eyes. “Pphh. I’ve heard that. They fucked up, as usual. The Romani were never Egyptians, and as far as we’re concerned, it’s everybody else who’s cursed to stand still.”

With that, she returns to the living area. The back of the sweatshirt reads, *Can’t hack reality? Try reality-hacking*, in purple on mauve.

**T**urned about on the TransCanada, we head southeast from Brooks, Alberta, backtracking. After breakfast, Lyndon Norm goes to work on the plumbing system at the rear of the module, and asks me to assist. “Well, carpentry’s my specialty,” I tell him, “but I can turn a wrench or hold a spanner if needed.”

“Specialization? Hah!” Lyndon’s voice is a thin alto, an odd match for his stocky, broad-waisted frame. Somehow he manages to wedge himself into a closetful of tangled pipes and cables. The place stinks of methane and mildew. “Don’t let ’em do that to ya. Hand me that bag of filters, there; thanks. You go to school?”

“Well, I applied to a few, wanted to be an architect, but...uh...I couldn’t get in. Tough competition. But I was in an apprenticeship program for two years, first as an electrician, then as a carpenter. Then they cut off the funds last year, and I haven’t worked since.”

“Bastards — here, tighten these gaskets for me — they couldn’t care less about education. So what? Do it anyway.”

“Do which?”

“Become an architect, or whatever. Everything’s online, isn’t it? Math tutors, manuals, design standards, expert systems. Schools are just a game for rich kids anyway.”

Sue’s laugh again, from the kitchen. “Watch it, Fifer, that’s Actuator propaganda. And they don’t accept excuses.”

“Damn right. Nobody’s stopping you.” With some difficulty, Lyndon extricates himself from the plumbing system, and replaces the service panel. “For a bunch of lazy mediabase artists, the Actuationist Transnational actually have the right idea. If I want to do something, or if I see something that needs doing, I do it. Learned a lot of electronics, automotive maintenance, metal fabrication. Like, I got tired of being Lynda Kulikosky, and now I’m not.

“Hey, thanks for the help.” He picks up the toolbox and heads off to the second module. Lynda? Oh, right, those hips. First transmale I ever met.

“**D**amn you, I didn’t see that one...” Noel pipes up in annoyance as Haji steals her Queen’s rook. They’re playing Choice, a Chess variant in which the board is defined by the players as the game progresses. She’s warding off an attack from a sector of board that didn’t exist five moves back. The Chess-pieces and board are black and red.

“Your charms and wards aren’t gonna help you now.” Haji tosses his head, jet-black hair (grey at the roots) spilling over his small brown face. In contrast, his opponent is pale as winter sky, probably from pigment inhibitors; a Teknik fashion, as are the jagged patterns of shaven scalp running through her crew-cut.



Haji and Noel are pseudochildren, or X-youth, as they prefer to be called. Their apparently ten-year-old bodies are the results of dangerous and illegal synthetic-hormone treatments which halt most growth processes at the onset of puberty. Extended youth. But look at the crosshatching of lines around Haji's features, the cataract obscuring one iris, signs of the accelerated breakdown of an overstressed metabolism. He's not yet thirty, but I would guess that he has less than three years to live, and knows it.

I've returned to my seat by the pitted and scoured windows, trying to ignore them. Too strange, too alien. I'm not interested in how they came to be what they are, what bizarre histories brought them here. I don't care. It's all I can do to watch the desiccated landscape slide by, and try to decide on some sort of plan for myself.

All I want, really, is to find a job over in BC, and maybe a new girl to room with.

"**T**hats a good one... huh." Scred puts down his book and scratches the bristles on his chin. "I got curious about these Christas, so I looked 'em up. I knew they were mostly women, but I thought they were, y'know, preparing for Jesus to come back, like most of the other kooks out there. But no, they've got an original tack: they think God is about to send us *Her only Daughter*, get it? Makes a weird kind of sense, I mean, having made such a hash of it with a male incarnation, can't hurt to try it again as a woman." He chuckles, turns off the book, folds the screen down, and pockets it. "There are worse memes, I guess."

An unfamiliar word. "Worse what?"

"Memes, you know, contagious ideas – don't they teach memetics in school anymore? Well, no, I guess these days they wouldn't want kids to...uh, question received ideas. Might be subversive. Huh. Well, a meme is like a gene, it exists solely to reproduce itself. Except that a meme consists of pure information, and it replicates itself by infecting a person's mind and inducing them to parrot it to other people, like I'm doing now. I'm trying to infect you with the Meta-meme, the meme about memes. You don't have to take it literally, it's a metaphor, right? But a damned useful one..."

For the first time I regret pawning my old book and holo-discs for travelling money, and I ask Scred if he'd lend me his micro. He passes it to me: a new Zoetec model with a terabyte biomemory. I access its encyclopedia, and call up the entry on memetics. Good to have something to occupy my attention, other than that desolate New Sahel outside the window.

**E**ast of Medicine Hat, we leave the TransCanada, following an almost invisible side-road into the Cypress Hills. The turnoff skirts an immense Fuji Holochrome billboard, and the glamour model's face appears to move as we pass by. Disconcertingly, her gaze follows the viewer, then she winks.

The road shortly arrives at the outskirts of Mount Cyprian, a vacant town long since picked clean by scavengers, decaying on a hillside stripped equally bare of topsoil and eroding into deep gullies. Hardly a brick left standing, even telephone poles uprooted and carted away. What remains is more of a 1:1 scale

map than a town, a plan laid out in crumbling pavement and exposed foundations.

Our considerable dust-plume catches up to us, swallowing the trailer as we grind to a halt on the cracked playground of a dismantled grade school. When the cloud clears I can see an assortment of eighteen-wheelers, buses, RV's, vans with campers, all scattered about the dirty streets and parking lots. Nomads wave to newcomers, hustling to erect tents, prefabs, tipis, and pressurized shelters. Fibreoptic webs are being draped between portable masts, on which satellite dishes are aimed at the southern sky, while cooking fires exchange smoke signals with the dust-trails of approaching vehicles.

"Let's go, Fifer," Noel shouts, suddenly outside my window. "Link to it, we need a hand."

Right. Stretch those legs, stupid.

Out in the morning sunshine, it's already pushing thirty-five Celsius. Lyndon has unlocked a cargo section in the undercarriage of the first trailer module. All together, we haul the entire section out like a drawer, and extend the outside supports. A hefty tarp of mottled green and white polymatrix is wrestled out, exposing a densely packed trusswork underneath. Step motors begin to purr, manipulators lift the first struts into position, and everyone stands clear. These things are always fun to watch.

The dome unfolds itself with the slow grace of a rose blooming in timelapse, triangular units linking into orderly structures, working in a spiral until the thirty-metre half-sphere encloses the entire trailer. Lyndon, Vicky, Scred, and I climb up onto the lightweight hex-pent struts, raising the tarp and snapping it into place at the hubs. Sunlight filtering through the fabric paints the interior a dappled green like the shade under the leaf-canopy of an old-growth forest.

Windblown silicate particles patter against the skin of the dome, and a dust-devil describes a vortex outside the threshold. The single broad doorway is high enough to admit the box-van, which has only just arrived.

We're helping to unload merchandise from the back of the van when Scred notices Sal, the driver. "Pssst, Fife. Tell me that's not a guy in a skirt and blouse... A lady with a beard, maybe?"

"Neither, I think." Christ, I hope none of the Norms overhear this. "Or both, rather. I mean, se's an hermaphrodite. Probably by surgery, a sex change, like Lyndon. Or maybe se was born that way. One of the Sanpharma gene-therapy kids."

We drop the cases where the display tables are being set up, and head back for another load. "Jeez, Fife, but these folks are a damned strange lot of buggers. Nice enough people, sure, but..."

"Yeah, I know." I warn him not to call Sal a *he* or a *she*. Instead of *he*, *him*, and *his*, they prefer to use *se*, *sem*, and *ses*. And *Ser* in place of *Mister*.

"You gotta be kidding." Shaking his head, he deposits another case. "They think they can get everybody to adopt a – a whole new set of pronouns?"

"Maybe not everybody, but...it sort of depends on how big this Pange movement gets. That's their name for it: Pan-genderism. They say they want to integrate the best attributes of both genders, whatever that means."

Listen to me. I've been aware of all this stuff for



years, on an intellectual level, and it worries me that I'm now having difficulty dealing with the reality. Polymarriages are very rare, not to mention transmales, Panges, and X-youth, but this Famli is an exception, even among Nomads. When this gathering breaks up, in a week or two, I think I might head on to BC with some other Famli or caravan.

**H**aji is running a fibreoptic line out to a nearby tent, where a local com-nexus is being set up. His input to the Famli business is entirely digital: poetry, hypermusic, environs, video pornography. Yes, self-produced vidporn, which shouldn't surprise me, because how else does one become an X-youth? They often find lucrative careers in the industry, and now he's gone independent. Once again, I tell myself not to let it bother me.

The Norms immediately begin making sales, trading the fruits of their portable biosynthesis rig: pharmaceuticals, synfuels, and polymatrix fabric. You can buy such stuff for less, from industrial sources, but the Nomads prefer to purchase from each other. It's part of their Code, their meme-complex.

A hand-painted sign is lifted over the dome entrance: NORM FAMILI, Biosynthetics and Netmedia. Scred shakes his head at it. "Why can't you guys seem to spell anything right? What's wrong with family?"

"A family is something you're born into," Sue explains, leaning against the doorframe. "We use a kind of New Guinea Pidgin spelling when we define something a bit differently. A new word for a new meaning."

Haji has just returned with his spool of optical fibre. "Speaking of which, nobody's come up with a new name for this sinkhole. I mean, Mount Cyprian – not much of a mountain, is it?"

"Um, how about...Çatal Hüyük?" I suggest.

Only Sue gets it, laughing. "Yes! That's good: re-inventing the city."

Noel appears from under the dome with two empty plastic water containers, and tosses one to me. "You're drafted. C'mon, we have to go pay our respects to the local genii at the well."

I stumble after her, workboots crunching on the gritty playground. "What's that, again?"

"Never mind. A little pagan humour." Her white shorts, T-shirt, and high-albedo skin throw off an amazing glare as she trots over debris from the grade school's deconstruction.

"You really into that stuff? Paganism, I mean."

"Well, not as much as Sal, who practices the craft. Haji, he's a Chaote, and Sue is a bit of a gene-mystic, like a lot of green techs. The others are avowed atheists. Me, I like what Placidus said: *Creo quia absurdum est*."

"Which means?"

"I believe because it is absurd."

Once again, the town has a main street, businesses, and shops. In the impromptu marketplace, crowds of Nomads kick up a yellow haze around makeshift stalls with canvas banners for billboards. *Freshly Cultured Meat and Vegetables* are advertised, sold by paunchy, squint-eyed Albertans in cowboy shirts and stetsons, rural folk whose soil has dried up and billowed away. The proprietor of *Orb-Man Aerogel Products, Florida* must have high connections, selling zeegee materials

manufactured in orbit. He probably used to operate out of a mall and live in a luxury condo, both now three metres under the rising seas.

We are all refugees. The truth of the old cliché has never fully struck home before. Here there are northerners, chased south by the Western Secessionist conflict; ex-Californians whose fault-straddling cities have lain in heaps ever since the Shocks; fallout victims from downwind of the Atlanta Fermi-IV reactor. Once these people were forced to move, they decided not to stop, and this is probably the only reason why they haven't yet been rounded up and dumped into the swarming Transfer Camps.

The authorities are out in force already, searching for proscribed bio-products, smuggled goods, and underdocumented aliens. Our societal immune systems, here to protect us from all these virulent diseases. Not only APP and Customs, but also C-SIS types (obvious in their mirrored glasses), and even a few military, from Special Counter-Insurgency Units. (And what are they doing here?)

**N**oel and I take our places in line at the water-truck. Across the street is Hassan's Holodome, a sixty-metre inflated geodesic, the largest in town. Today's shows: Bachant's *A Thousand and One Nights*, and *Lunar Elegy*, "Shot on location!" by the same director. (The first one is better, if only because there's less heavy breathing. Bachant is famous for her self-indulgence.)

A tap on my shoulder. "Excuse me," asks the young woman who has queued up behind me, "I don't suppose you have any organic sludge to offload, do you?"

"I...what?" Staring at her, baffled, I try not to laugh.

Noel steps forward and rescues me. "Yeah, I think we do. We've just arrived, so I doubt we've sold it, yet. If not, it's all yours, at local market standard. I'm Noel Norm, and this is Fifer."

"Hey, great. Thanks." She quickly links to the fact that she's talking to an X-youth, rather than a stunningly precocious ten-year-old. "I'm Adriana, from Rexdaler. That's a small settlement, about twenty kilometres from here. We heard about the gathering and I was sent to get some extra organics and other stuff." An easy smile, despite the heat and the airborne grit, as she points out her pick-up, a blunt-nosed Subaru parked nearby.

I can sense that she's out of her element, like myself, suddenly aware of the Earth's spin, not sure if she likes it, but trying to roll along with it. Wearing an oversized yellow jumpsuit, turned up at the ankles and wrists, it's hard to say but she's probably close to my age, with bleached blonde hair cropped close, except where it sweeps over her left eye.

"I figured you were a local." Noel hands our containers to the water-seller, along with her Famli's barter-card. "Next time, just get in touch with the gathering's World3 nexus. Most everything saleable is on the market listings. We'd even deliver."

I hang about, feeling rather foolish and dumbfounded, as the girls work out the details of transferring the organics. Then we pick up our water and are struggling off through the crowded market. The plastic containers drip with condensation.

"What...what, exactly...is organic sludge?"

"You'll see."



**W**ith a lot of cursing and sweating, Scred and I manage to roll the monstrous tank up the ramp, onto the bed of Adriana's pickup. The stench of concentrated sewage and treatment enzymes doesn't seem so strong now. It was worse just after Lyndon had decanted the sludge from the trailer's biogas plant, before he sealed it.

Adriana wants to buy us both a drink for our efforts, which sounds like a great idea to me, but Scred checks his watch, says he'd like to have a look around the market, and takes off. So she and I stroll over to Peregrine's, a bar-tent hung with trendy bioluminescent lighting tubes. We take our beers to a table as far as possible from the sound system, which is shaking the floor with Angel Sung's latest insidious Chinapop earworm.

Adriana's telling me about Rexdaler, how they manage to live on the fringes of the Dustbowl. "It started as part of a provincial land-reclamation scheme, and grew from there. Now there's four hundred of us, and we've got a few hundred hectares of greenhouses, but we don't seem to have made much progress with the reclamation business. I can't really say, only been there for two years. I'm from Brandon, originally..."

Shouldn't project my own feelings onto her, but here they are again, reflected on her face as she glances down at the table. The biolights cast a zone of green down her right side, a wash of red across her left.

"Isn't that jumpsuit just a little too big?" Good work, Fife, insult her taste in clothes.

But she laughs and tugs at a sleeve. "I know, they make me look like a scrawny kid, but I don't fit into the smaller ones. We all wear them, saves money that way. We share clothes, food, and just about everything else. It's that kind of life, at Rexdaler, we have to go without a few luxuries for the short term, and take a long-range view of things."

That kind of commitment has always impressed me. I find myself talking about my Bahai period, in early high school, when I dropped my parent's Lutheran faith for something more universal. For a while, I enjoyed their sense of community, but I lapsed out of that as well. "Anyhow, I'm drifting off topic. You really think you can fight the climate shift, turn back the desert?"

"Well, actually..." She hesitates. "That's not our main concern anymore. Sure, we keep at it, the government is paying for it, but only a few of us still take it seriously. Why should we break our backs for a change that might not even come until we're dead? When Garver—that's our Chairperson—when he took over, morale was at zero, but he's given us a new purpose. He's a great guy, you should meet him."

A piercing beep from her wristwatch interrupts. "Aargh. I have to be getting back to town. We keep early hours, y'know?"

So we finish our beers and step outside.

The Earth has rolled us into her shadow, bringing Venus out of the violet dusk. The wind is still sifting

through the random streets of the market. At her pickup, Adriana hesitates with the key in the door. "I really enjoyed our chat."

"Yeah, so did I."

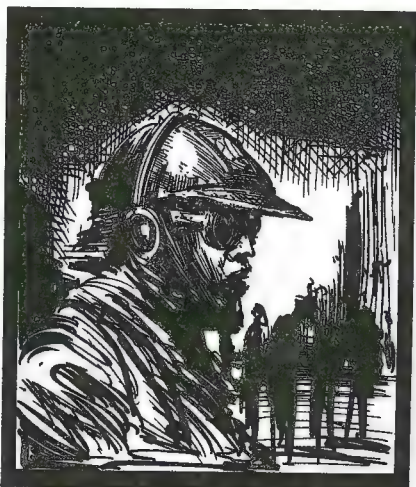
An uncertain pause, then: "There's a good chance I'll be back again, maybe tomorrow."

"That'd be good. You know where to find me." Thinking, what's the point, idiot, you're leaving in a few days...

Then she's taking those two steps, putting her hand behind my neck, and kissing me. Probably meant to be a little peck on the cheek, but it's turned into something else, and I have to hold her, simply to stay on my feet. There's a sense of desperation to it, makes me want to calm her somehow, but—

*from over her shoulder, I see a shape, a dust-devil, a micro-tornado swirling up under a floodlamp, and Jodi is in there, trapped in a whorl of sand, naked, stumbling blindly, crying, and caked with dust*

— I push Adriana away in a panic. Vaguely I hear her asking me what's wrong, but I'm already running, tripping over tent pegs, trying to escape back to the Norm', getting lost, feeling the tears that are forced out by an upwelling of despair, guilt, and fear.



**S**cred finds me sitting against the doorframe of the green and white dome, trying to pull myself together.

"Jeez, man, what's got into you? You're covered in dirt." He kneels beside me and tries to check my pupils, but I push his hands away.

"I'm straight, okay? All I had was a beer. Just one." I try to tell him what I saw, but it all comes out in fragments and doesn't make a lot of sense.

"Well, shit, just sounds like a hallucination, Fife."

"Of course I was hallucinating, I know that. But all I had was a beer."

Scred helps me to my feet. "Sure, but you can't trust these Nomads. They could be enhancing the stuff, or somebody was filling the bar with inhalants, y'know, vaporous drugs. I've heard of places that do that. Makes people spend more, right?"

"No, Scred, really, I know what it is. It got to Jodi and now it's getting to me, man. I'm losing it—"

"Don't give me that shit. C'mon, be a man, will you? Let's go inside and watch some of Haji's vids."

**A**fternoon, and "Çatal Hüyük" is a chaotic blur in the harsh sunlight, a convergence zone of human advection currents. Mount Cyprian's flanks are being slowly but visibly pulverized by the wind, and everything is layered with a thin film of loess. Aeolian depositions, a poetic term I remember from Biospheric Studies.

Didn't mean to sleep in, but it was a long time before I could sleep at all, and now it's after siesta. Wandering through the market, I run into Scred, who seems hurried but wants to talk.

"Got this for ya." He hands me something in a small paper bag patterned with smiling blue snails. "Can't



go see a girl without some chocolates to give her, can you? Got them from a Dutch couple, over that way. They make 'em themselves."

"Well, thanks, man. But...after last night...I kinda doubt she'll be back."

"Huh. Couldn't blame her, could ya? But, uh, isn't that her red Subaru, over there?" He points it out, across the street, gives me a thump on the back, and strides off.

It takes nearly an hour, but I manage to track her down, at a hardware-dealer's stall, where she's picking up a large coil of high-temp superconducting fibre. Today's overlarge jumpsuit is faded blue with black patches.

Always the well-conditioned prairie boy, I tip my cap. "Help you with that, miss?"

Adriana hefts the coil onto one shoulder, and tries not to smile, failing. "Didn't mean to scare you last night."

"You didn't. I mean, I think I just scared myself, is all. Acted pretty strange, didn't I?" I offer her the bag of chocolates. "Here, I...hope this will make up for it."

She accepts the gift, and says she has a few more purchases to make for her collective. So together we begin a slow circle through the market, and the conversation returns to where it left off last night.

"You said something about a 'new purpose' that this guy, Garver, brought about?"

She replies slowly at first, approaching a delicate subject. "It created a lot of friction...and most of our more religious colleagues up and left because of it. But Garver convinced the rest of us." She takes a long look at me, and becomes more fervent. "Fifer, we want to be around when all this becomes green again. In fact, we want to be alive when the next ice-age happens and rolls over it all, and live to see the next interglacial after that. And we just might. We're setting up our own biostasis facility."

"A cryonics society? You're not going to freeze yourselves?"

"Vitrification. Not exactly freezing."

"Whatever, I still don't -"

"We've got twenty residents who aren't going to make it 'til the spring, Fifer. Most of them are geriatric, one is an X-youth like your friend, Noel, and all of them are terminal. Garver doesn't trust the big cryonics firms, so we're going to care for our own. When one of us dies, they'll go into biostasis, and the rest will keep watch over them. It's a good plan, Fifer. Like Garver says: permanent death is just an obsolete meme."

"This is what all the self-sacrifice is about? What happens if they can't revive you, if they never figure it out?"

"Wake up, Fifer, the Breakthrough can't be more than five or ten years down the road. Once they can make the nanomachines self-replicate, cell repair should be a simple matter."

"Yeah, right, nanotech will work miracles; they've been saying that for decades."

Her reply is drowned out by a distorted voice over a police megaphone. Then an exchange of automatic gunfire, over by Hassan's. Very loud, close by. Everyone reacts, but it ends as abruptly as it began.

The cops are soon raising a cordon of yellow tape,

isolating the large tent next to the Holodome, and pushing back curious Nomads, Adriana and me among them. Rumours are spreading through the crowd like spores hitting ripe fruit.

"Known Secessionist guerrillas, I'm not kidding. That's what I heard on the police band." The speaker is a yellow-haired Teknik with blue skinstripes, wearing a wireless video headset, so he would be getting the news as it came in on the nex, "...a meeting of some kind. Must've been using the gathering as a cover. Six of them cornered by the SCI unit...three are dead and one wounded."

Two police vans worm their way up to the cordon. The APP clear a path through the crush of onlookers, then wheel the injured man out, belted to a stretcher. I'm more than a bit distressed when I see his face. It's Scred. There's a bloodstain seeping through the sheet over his chest, and he's writhing and hollering, either in pain or rage or both, a horrible sound, but surely they'd sedate him or something?

Scred. A West-Sep, for Christ's sake...

Adriana has recognized him, too. "That was -"

"Yeah, I know, let's get out of this crowd, okay?"

We manage to get across the street, but I have to stop. I feel as if reality has begun to erode like the hillside above us. I'm not sure if I can keep my footing.

Somebody has parked their rig in the intersection just to our left. The near side of the trailer is now being folded up, revealing a self-powered P.A. system and a backdrop which reads: *Be sure your sin will find you out*. Taking advantage of the spontaneous audience, a Retributionist preacher grabs his microphone and begins railing at everybody from this mobile platform. His magnified image then appears on a three-metre flatscreen above the stage, a live video feed from an unseen camera.

Almost unnoticed, Adriana has slipped her arm about my waist. "C'mon, let's not listen to this sucker-head..."

The preacher is lunging around with a Bible in his grip, shouting about transgression, the sanctity of nature, and hiding from our guilt, but most of his congregation seems to be dispersing in boredom. Then it hits me: none of them are *memetically susceptible*, or else they'd have long ago joined millions of others in the cult-settlements, enslaved to one or another maniacal saviour. *Selected out*.

Somewhat nervous, Adriana opens the paper bag and hands me a chocolate, then takes one out for herself. "Hey, Fifer, let's...let's get away from here..."

I'm too fascinated to move. "Of course, these Nomads are immune..." The only people remaining seem to be hecklers (Lyndon among them), and a few others shouting them down - "Let the man speak!" - obviously cultists planted in the crowd. Absently, I take a bite out of the chocolate -

But it's a fucking mint cream, and I spit it out into the dirt, feeling my eyes water, histamines boiling up, the first sneeze coming on. "Asshole practical jokes -" Then it hits.

As if triggered by the sneeze, the giant flatscreen image explodes into multicoloured snow, and is replaced by an unclothed barely-pubescent girl straddling an older man, and yes, the girl is Noel, but with long hair and tanned skin. Between sneezes, I can see audience members reacting with either horror



or laughter, but the Bible-thumper onstage is unaware that his video-send has been hijacked. He goes on raving about the Lord's justice, even while the vid-pirate begins to dither with the explicit image. Now the preacher's face is digitally superimposed, in a clumsy fashion, so that it belongs to the man under the pseudo-girl.

Fistfights are breaking out in the audience between cultists and hecklers, and now the cops are moving in. Probably expecting a riot, they advance with activated staves, stunning everybody in their path. Adriana tugs at my arm, but something's just crashed into consciousness, what I've known all along –

they're all trying to infect my mind: the preacher, the Nomads, the Actuators and Panges, Christas and Pagans, billboard holograms, vidpornographers, Chinapop netbands, constantly abrading my defences, trying to subvert their way inside, even Scred, even

– Adriana finally drags me away, down the narrow path between two camper-trailers. Wheezing and sniffing, I let her lead me along, while I experience a distinct feeling of coming down, like I've been beamed up on lifters all day. I remember Scred's paranoid ideas, something about inhalants, pheromones, and hormonal triggers. But, no, he couldn't have planned this, no way...

I pull her to a halt behind the place that sells aerogel products. Just trying to remain standing, I can hear the gyros screaming in my head, maintaining stability.

Adriana wants to keep moving. "Fifer, they might've seen you with that terrorist, that Scred person. It's not safe for you to hang around here. Listen, come to Rexdaler with me. If you don't like, you don't have to stay, just –"

A right cross and she lands on her side in the dirt. I nearly fold up from a pain in my hand like I've cracked a metacarpal, while she puts a palm to her cheek, stunned. Rasping, hoarse, I hear myself yell, "Did Garver send you here as a recruiter? Want me to spend the rest of my life nursing a stack of frozen fucking corpses? Fuck that!"

And by the time she's scrambled up and fled, by the time I realize what I've done, and the pain is flaring up, bringing tears, only then does it occur to me that I'm being hopelessly paranoid, that she probably had no intention of picking up anyone when she came here. But now it's far too late to explain and I doubt that I could make sense of it anyway.

Nearby, a medical chopper whines and throws up a wave of dust, carrying Scred away.

**T**he storm-front appears as a black smudge along the southern horizon, visible now from the windows of the Norms' trailer rig. The dome has been folded back into the cargo section, and the constant winds howl in the vent-covers on the roof. A granular hiss across the floor as the door opens, and Sue climbs into the trailer. Despite the curtains over the doors, and the insulated windows, and the electrostatic air filters, still the sand gets in.

"Larry says we can avoid the bulk of the storm if we leave in less than half an hour." Haji gestures to the weathermap on the screen as Sue takes the other seat. "Think we can do it?" Despite the news over World3 of the sudden storm, he's still in good spirits, still high after invading the preacher's video feed over the local nex. He even caught the whole riot on disc. Chaotes, they do things like that.

Yingsiu rubs her eyes, exhausted. "We're almost finished the rec-work. We'll make it."

Outside, the shelters have been coming down, tents and domes and tipis packed away. Reclamation teams have been completing the demolition of Mount Cyprian. Leaving behind no trash heaps or waste products, they adhere to the Code: they've pulled up almost all of the old unused pavement in the area, and planted gene-modified desert grasses to help fix the soil.

"What's the point?" I mutter. A monster sandstorm approaching from the south, and they're planting grass?

Although the brandykinin-blockers and syndorphins have muted the pain, I'm going to have to get somebody to look at my hand. I have this nagging vision of Adriana, driving back to Rexdaler with an ugly bruise forming under her eye. Is her home some kind of biostasis-cult, or what? I imagine four hundred happy zombies, waiting to be vitrified, drugged with inhalants that have been secretly infused into their shared unisex clothing by the immortalist, Garver. It would explain why everything seemed to get more bizarre the closer I got to her, like that weird hallucination. Or am I just making excuses for myself?

I've caught Scred's contagion, his paranoia. Would he have given me mint chocolates on purpose, expecting my allergic reaction to block out the effects of the supposed aerosol drugs? And was he really here for a clandestine West-Sep conference? I don't want to think about any of it, and I can't bear to look out this damned window any longer.

Black mares' tails are stretching across the southern sky, where a featureless brown wall is consuming the horizon. The market breaks up into caravans and convoys. The last of the Norms clamber aboard, Lyndon revs up the gas-turbine engines, and we lurch back onto the road, following the box-van. The Fuji Holo-chrome girl winks again as we pass by. The rig sprays her with gravel and dust.

I feel buffeted by the winds, the dust-layer is being blown away, and my immune systems are faltering completely.

Picking up Scred's micro, I go to Larry's interface panel, and patch into it. I load a copy of the Code from the Norms' library into the book, then return to my seat.

The Code begins: "1.01: Gaia has taught us a lesson in mobility..."

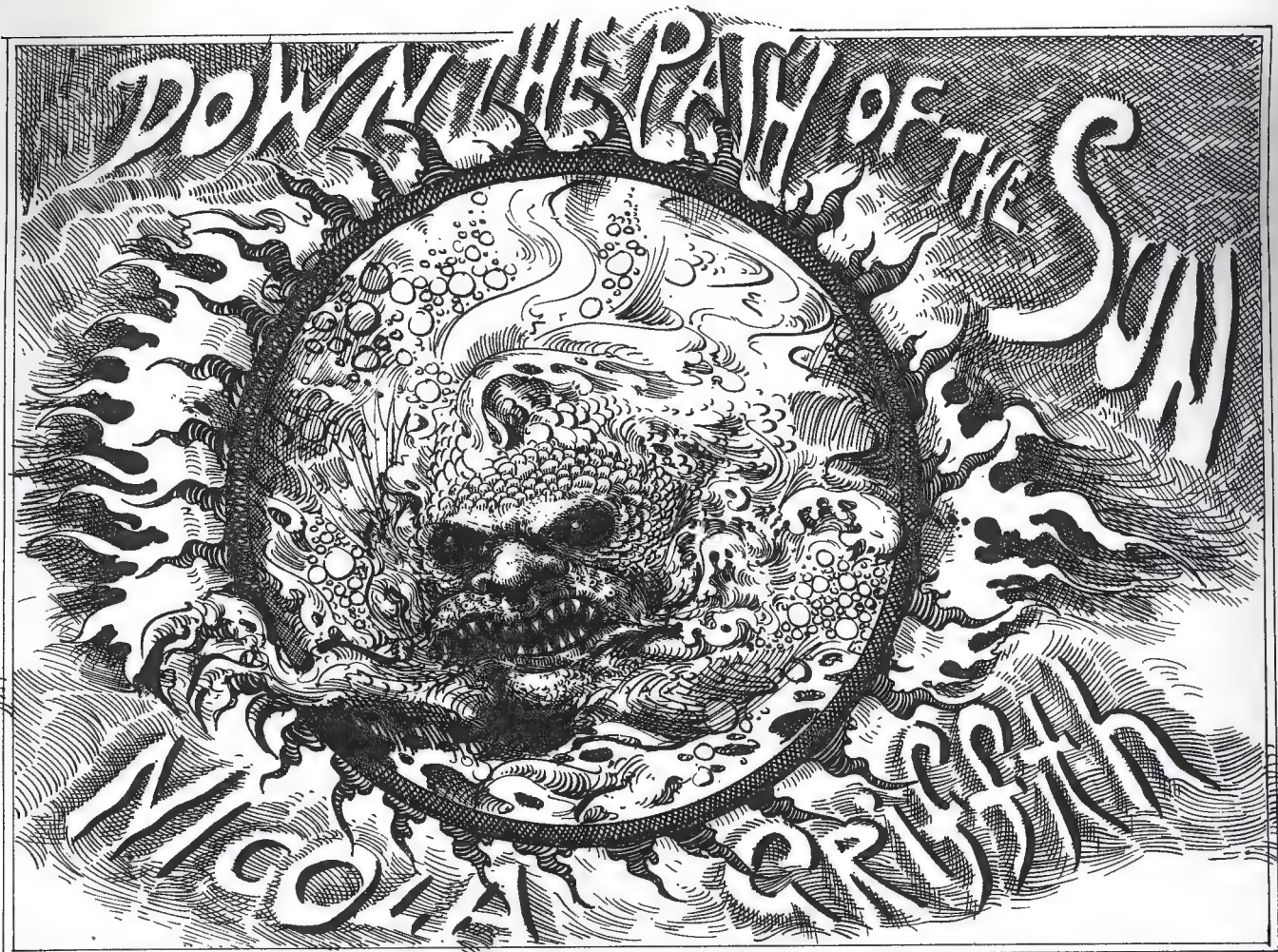
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Glenn Grant is a Canadian, and editor of the semi-professional magazine *Edge Detector*. He was 24 years old when he wrote the above (last year). To the best of our knowledge, it is his first professionally published short story.

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I dreamed again: Diggy and I were on the beach. Although my sister and I were the same age as we are now, it was before the plague: my father and three other sisters were there, too, shadowy and indistinct, like ghosts. Surrounded by a bubble of quiet, we sat facing each other on the sand, digging.

Something got tossed ashore on a breaker: a shell, the colour of caramel and milk, big as my fist and smooth as ivory. I wanted it, even though it was forbidden.

Diggy breathed at my shoulder. I reached out and took the shell.

The air rolled and the sea heaved, sluggish as soup; Diggy's eyes widened in fear. I should have uncurled my fingers, let the shell drop onto the sand; given in. Instead, I gripped it tighter; I had found some infinitely precious thing to enrich my life always.

The seagod came roaring out of the waves. The air trembled with his anger but only Diggy and I could see him. We began to run. Everyone began to run: the sea was sweeping in at a terrifying speed. The sea was gaining; we were not going to make it. Still, I refused to drop the shell.

A huge wave crashed down and I leapt, reaching for the railings topping the sea wall. I caught them, held them. I had won. Then, with sickening inevitability, I realized that I did not see Diggy anywhere.

She was clinging, half-submerged, to my right ankle. Above the crash and hiss of the spray I could hear her screaming: *Karo! Help me!*

The tidal wave fell on us.

There was nothing I could do. I lay against the wall, holding on with the strength of desolation; one hand,

then the other, was torn from my ankle. I still had my shell, my infinitely precious shell, but Diggy was gone. The seagod had devoured her.

I woke up on my back, heart thumping hard enough to break bones. I lay still, listening to the lap of water against stone down below.

Next to me, Fin twitched in her sleep, trying to pull back the blankets I must have dragged from us while I dreamed. Carefully, I slid off the opened-up sleeping bag and tucked her up. I kissed her but resisted the urge to stroke her hair back into its braids; Fin's hair is like Fin, wiry and black, always pulling free of restraint. She pulled me along, too: knowing Fin, I knew that grief was not everything, that Evelyn, my mother, was wrong.

I pulled on a shirt and loose trousers before I pushed past the curtain that partially divided the soaring fourth-floor of the warehouse. Old Will lifted his head and banged his tail on the floorboards as I crossed to where he lay next to my little sister in the corner. With one hand I scrubbed at his head behind his ears, the other I held by Diggy's face. She breathed, warm and soft against my palm. My relief was immediate, as always. I squatted back on my heels and contented myself with watching her eyelids flutter as she lived through some dream of her own. The pre-dawn light gleamed on the hair framing her girl-plump face: silver blonde around lightly toasted gold. Since the plague, Diggy had become more and more my responsibility. I glanced over to where my mother slept and felt the familiar confusing mix of helplessness, love and anger.



By the window, away from the warmth of sleeping bodies, the April dawn pushed easily through the thin cotton to my skin.

Resting my elbows on the sill, I stared eastward. Other warehouses gaped open to the lightening sky; beyond them lay the sea. Eight years it had been like this: families like mine, like Fin's, finding and comforting each other in the quiet, in the emptiness that we would never fill. Since the plague, I had crossed paths with less than forty women and only a handful of men; all of us sterile.

**I**t had rained in the night, the air was fresh with damp early summer greenness. Here and there tiny puddles winked in the sun. The sky was dotted with cloud but the sun streamed from a wide patch of blue and my sweater lay warm across my shoulders. Fin could tell I did not want to talk and moved just ahead of me, gliding smooth and sure over the weed-patched cobbles. Now and then she disappeared, blending into shadow as she slipped, dart-slim, through a doorway or peered through a window cluttered with nature's rubbish.

Sometimes, when we walked like this along the dockfront, I tried to remember what it had all been like before, when there were thousands of well-fatted and loud-voiced people filling and emptying these warehouses all year round; when for every one who grew old and died, there was another new life to take their place. No-one was well-fatted now, not the people like me and Evelyn, or Fin and her grandmother Jess. Not the gangs either, though they were loud-voiced. Those gangwomen and men had that same strut and cruelty as Jess's little bantam rooster. Except, the rooster made me laugh with his piercing eye and puffed-up chest. I had not seen a gang for three or four years when, luckily, they did not see me. Jess reckoned they had probably all died – killed each other off and good riddance, she said. But we still slept on the fourth floor and Fin still checked doorways and windows. We all carried knives, even Diggy, and Fin carried a garotte as well. Old habits died hard.

**T**he sun was a full armspan above the horizon now, the only sound birdsong and the wavelets slapping up onto the waterway's silted banks. We lay, hip to hip and rib to rib in the middle of the wild wheat. The green ears flicked and rustled in the breeze.

We smiled, lazy after love. Gently, I ran my hand over the curve of Fin's hip, into the dip and over the upsweep of ribs and breast. Under my hand, fillets of muscle slid under her skin. My skin, tanned though it was, looked pale as sap wood against the loamy darkness of hers. We rested like that for a while.

The old waterway ran directly east where, with other waterways, it joined with the river mouth and the sea. The times that we had got here to watch the dawn, we noticed there was a slight tide which pulled east towards where the sun rose. If you waited for just the right moment, the whole waterway turned copper red as the sun came up. The light seemed to suck the water towards it; I had seen twigs, even ducks, floating gently eastward towards the sea. Fin called it the path of the sun.

Today, we were too late for the sunrise and, anyway, we were there for the eggs. We left our boots and trousers by the waterside and waded in opposite directions along the bank, searching for egg-filled nests. Sometimes we would find none, sometimes so many that if we collected them all we would need to make two journeys with a basket. As I waded thigh-deep, I knew this was going to be one of those unlucky days.

All around me the wheat clicked and rattled; the few clouds I had seen earlier now covered half the sky. The breeze was rising, sending cloud shadow racing over mile after mile of swaying gold and green. Years ago, all this had been fen, wild and full of water creatures, until the farmers dug their irrigation channels and planted their crops, draining the land of variety and vitality. Further inland, waterways were silting up leaving standing pools where weeds and rushes thrived, choking the wheat. The water birds and river creatures were coming back.

A cloud covered the sun and I shivered. I had found nothing and it was getting chilly. Time to go back.

Fin was already rubbing herself dry with her bandanna. Only two eggs, she said, not worth carrying back to Evelyn and Diggy. We cracked them and sucked, throwing the empty shells away.

**F**in's family had taken over a barn for the summer, half for them, half for their animals; above us, where we sat around the huge scarred table eating and talking, the roof looked to be more gap than tile. It was early evening. The sun poured through the chinks and the open doors like old wine.

As Jess jabbed her fork in the air to emphasize a point, or stretched across to help herself to more salad, her knobby wrists flickered through hanging beams of light and shadow. Lean, with hair the grey of charcoal ash, she was the only one of the family who looked like Fin. Leoni and Sara, her daughters, looked to be just a little younger than Evelyn, and both were powerfully-built women with pads of firm fat at hip and breast. Sara could look grim sometimes: she had a way of narrowing her eyes and pausing before she spoke. Leoni had a bad leg from a fall through a rotten floor two years ago. Between them they had three daughters: Fin, Rachael and Else.

Evelyn called them a tribe, though they were not that many really; they had had their deaths just like anyone else. Maybe it was because they always talked and argued, made their decisions between them. In our family, the older you were the more right you were. Inevitably, Evelyn was right all the time.

The muscles in my neck and shoulders tightened at the memory.

When my mother had seen that look on my face and my hand in Fin's, she had known what it meant. Diggy had grinned.

"Diggy, leave the room."

"Let her stay, mother. We're a family."

She looked at Fin.

"This isn't a family."

"It could be."

"This family died eight years ago."

"We can start again."

"No."

"Listen. Please. We could all live together, Fin's



family and ours, sharing everything. We'd be safer, happier."

"Happier? You've never had children, Karo, you don't know what it's like to lose them and to know there'll never be any more."

"Do you want to lose me too?" I had asked, but quietly, so she would not hear.

Fin reached over and squeezed my hand. Tears dripped onto the scarred wood in front of me and someone handed me a strip of cloth to use as a handkerchief. No-one spoke but they understood: I had no real choices. I could not abandon Evelyn and Diggy and I could not try to change Evelyn's mind; she always refused to understand.

The tears were stopping already. After a while we cleared the table and settled down to enjoy talk and stories in the last of the patchy sunshine.

**W**alking back from Fin's, we trailed long shadows. The warehouse stood dark against the slow fire of the sky and suddenly, again, I was angry with Evelyn, a dull rage that ground at the base of my skull. Then we were clattering up the steps and my anger settled into its usual background crouch. I sighed, more concerned about facing Evelyn's disappointment when we came back without any eggs.

Halfway up the third flight, Fin flashed a smile over her shoulder.

"Bread."

Then I smelled it too. Despite myself, I felt a rare flush of affection for my mother: she knew there was nothing we liked better than fresh-baked bread. We slowed down, taking the steps one at a time: prolonging the anticipation.

The hot smell reminded me of when I was little, years before the plague: Evelyn, standing in a gleaming geometric kitchen, smartly shod feet on polished tile, kneading dough, sometimes letting me punch at it, sometimes disappearing through the door for a moment to make sure Diggy still slept. But always moving. Even when she relaxed, took her apron off and made coffee, her fingers would stray to the nape of her neck where she teased her weekly-set hair back into its curls. That was a habit she still had, even though she often looked surprised when her fingers encountered hair absolutely straight from years away from the hairdresser. There was no apron now, either, no coffee or gleaming kitchen; while the bread baked in an old iron stove she had no toddler to amuse or baby to check on. Sometimes I had seen her sitting there blankly, almost as if she had been turned off. It frightened me that she could look so not there. There was nothing wrong with daydreaming, but with Evelyn it was different. Once, when I was ill and she thought I was asleep, she had sat like that for hours. When she had finally moved, she had looked about her incredulously, then shrugged. Ever since then, I had never been able to shake the feeling that my mother really did not believe that all this was real. The long-gone world of families and technology lived in her memories like yesterday. Maybe closer. Though she did everything she had to do, she went about the business of life with an air of detachment, as though it did not really matter.

**F**or all its height and space, our room was hot. The last of the sun had poured directly in, mixing with the heat of bread-steam and stove-iron. Ignoring Evelyn's disapproval, I propped the door open wide and stripped down to my shirt. Fin and I split one of the flat loaves and spent the next few moments alternately tossing hot bread from hand to hand and burning our mouths.

"Where's Diggy?"

"She's not been back."

"Since when? Since she went to the food warehouse?"

Evelyn nodded.

"She left before midday."

I chewed slowly on my bread, refusing to get worried. Nothing could happen. She had a knife and knew how to use it and, besides, no-one had seen a gang for years. She was hurt maybe, in a fall like Leoni's? No. Old Will would have come back here on his own. She could not be lost, she knew her way around as well as I did and, again, Will could have found his way home. No. She must be playing one of her child-woman games. I could just imagine her, warm and snug in the warehouse paper stacks, humming happily to herself, Will half asleep across her legs, totally oblivious to the worry she might be causing. She had done it before, more than once.

Without a word I began pulling sweater and trousers back on.

"I'll come with you."

"No," I jerked my knife belt through the buckle. "Stay. One of us may as well enjoy the bread while it's hot."

She looked at me steadily, then nodded. She would stay behind in case... in case anything happened that Evelyn would not be able to cope with.

Then I was down the steps and outside. The crunch of boot on stone seemed loud in the gathering dark. I trotted, then ran, trotted then ran, alternating between worry and irritation. The night was soft and warm; soon I was slick with sweat.

The warehouse I was making for was a small one compared to most. Usually, we went in and out using a ground floor window but we had dragged open the great main doors just wide enough for Leoni and Evelyn to squeeze through. As soon as I saw those doors gaping wide I stopped: I knew something was wrong. My body would not move a muscle, I was not even sure I was breathing. Was Diggy in there? Was anyone else? Without conscious direction, my body unfroze and lowered itself gently onto the cobbles. I cursed the moon; tonight it was no bigger than a nail clipping and its light only emphasized the shadow thrown by the doors. I lay there for a while, thinking, making no more noise than a spider weaving her web. I felt cold. Not the cold of the hard cobbles pushing bruises into my hips but a bleak numbness. Something had happened to stop me feeling anything except a kind of lightness in my long muscles. I listened a while longer, then sheathed my knife, stood up and walked in.

It was the smell I would always remember: blood and shit. The air was thick with it, sweet and metallic. I spat into the dust and mud inside the door, trying to clear the taste from my mouth. I waited for a moment to let the unfamiliar shapes of shadow and



moonlight come clearer. Several crates and sacks had been burst open, the contents scattered, destroyed. For one whirling moment, feeling threatened to return and overwhelm my false calm. I forced it away.

It was old Will I saw first. His tail had been cut off and his back legs broken. By the blood trail and scuff marks, he had been able to drag himself quite a way before they had broken his back. Will, who had never known a blow or vicious word in his life. It was easy to imagine him running eagerly, as fast as his rheumatic legs would carry him, towards the gang who forced open the doors. How many had there been? Looking at the destruction, there must have been ten or more.

Methodically, I began to search for Diggy. Row by stacked row: walked to the end and then back again, slowly, checking behind this, on top of that. Then I began to shake. I tried to push it away again but it got worse; my legs would not hold me up. I knew where she was. I must have known from when I first set foot in the place because I had carefully avoided it. She would be in the paper stacks, or near there. Or what was left of her would be. The trembling stopped enough for me to stand up but I had to lean against a half open sack of raw wool. It reeked, but not enough to cover the new smells, the sickening smells. Now that I thought I knew where she was my body seemed unwilling to obey me. For every step forward I had to clench my jaws and fight the urge to run away, to run as far and as fast as I had ever run in my life.

Diggy had always liked to leave her legs bare, hating the restriction of trousers. Now they looked horribly, painfully naked. She was lying bent backwards over a roll of grey paper, her long shirt pulled up over her face and chest. One arm was trapped and tangled in the ripped and stained material, the other hung down, not quite touching the floor. Gently, I lifted her off the roll. She was heavier than usual and seemed to flop in all the wrong places. Before I laid her down, I straightened her shirt, buttoning it back up where it was not too badly torn. For a while I tried to get her broken leg to lie straight but then I gave up: it was already getting stiff. Teeth marks and bruises covered her body from the neck down, the rips and tears would not hide those. I was crying and the angry red marks and bloody smears kept splintering and merging then jumping back into focus as the tears splattered my sweater. The feeling I had now was familiar: like after the dream. Except, this was real – I would never again wake up to be reassured by her breathing.

By some chance that somehow made the other visible brutalities worse, Diggy's face was untouched. The tiny, gold-white wisps at her temples looked no different than they had this morning. There was a deep blue bruise on the back of her neck where they had broken it forcing her to arch over the roll. She stank, of their filth and her own blood and excreta. And there was a lot of blood. I would have to clean her up.

I soaked her shirt in water from outside and wiped at her carefully. I was dazed with hatred for those that had done this; hatred sang hot and light through my veins. I took off my own shirt and dressed her in it, hiding most of the ugliness. I looked for her missing sandal but could not find it. Very well. I took off her remaining one, that looked better. It was when I was combing through her hair with my fingers that I

suddenly realized her neck sheath was empty. Where was her knife? My heart thumped under my ribs as though someone had kicked it. Where was Diggy's knife?

Then I was on my feet, feverishly pushing aside crates, plunging my hand into sacks. Where was her knife? I scraped my bare arms, bruised my spine shoving aside a rusted machine. I had to find the knife. If it was bloody then she had used it. That was important to me; I had to know. Where was that knife? I roared, trying to rattle the walls with the sounds of my pain. I ran up and down the stacked aisles, desperate, frantic.

But it was not there. No knife. Tears were running steadily down my face now, splashing warm then turning cold on my bare chest. I knelt by Diggy's head and promised her she would have my knife, that I would put it in her sheath for her, that I would find her knife one day and use it for my own. And I cried until my face was swollen and my nose ran. Then I quieted and felt that strange lethargy you only get when you cannot cry any more.

That was how Fin found me, kneeling by Diggy's head, still and calm. She thought I was in shock but once she realized I was not, she knelt next to me in silence. After a little while I stirred and turned to her. We held each other and I wiped at her tears with my hand.

"They even killed the dog." Her voice was thick. "A dog. And poor Diggy."

I just nodded.

"I sent Evelyn to get Jess and the others."

"You sent her and she went?"

"Yes."

There were no echoes in the warehouse. Every word hung dead in the air. I was trembling again.

"Here, put it on." Fin handed me my sweater. Of course, I was cold. I hardly noticed the irritation of wool on bare skin.

"Fin, her knife was gone. But I couldn't find it. Will you look? I've searched everywhere..."

We froze at the tiny sounds from door and window. With a look of apology, Fin pulled my knife from Diggy's neck sheath and handed it to me. She slid her own out of leather and motioned for me to stay where I was.

"Fin! Karo! Are you in there?" Else's voice, strong but cautious.

"Diggy? Diggy? Are you there Diggy?" Evelyn, sounding weak and puzzled. I tried to answer but my throat had closed around my grief again. Rachael and Else padded feline and dangerous around the warehouse. I heard Fin explaining, Jess cursing, Evelyn shouting for Diggy again and again until Sara shut her up. The air was hot with adrenalin, we were all breathing very fast.

Jess stooped to help me up. She stood for a moment with her old tree-root hands on my shoulders, letting old pain acknowledge new. Then she stepped aside: there was more.

I looked over to Evelyn.

"Karo? Where's Diggy?" She started towards me. "Who are these people, why are we here?"

I took her hand. It was limp and warm.

"Don't worry. I'm here. You don't have to do any-



thing. Why don't you go with Sara for now? I'll join you later."

She nodded and allowed Sara to steer her gently towards the door; Rachael and Else followed. My mother had finally retreated into her land of yesterdays forever.

Jess waited. She looked down at Diggy.

"Where will you take her?"

"Out to sea."

She nodded, then looked straight at me. Her eyes were bright.

"We'll take care of Evelyn for now. Tomorrow we'll talk for a long time."

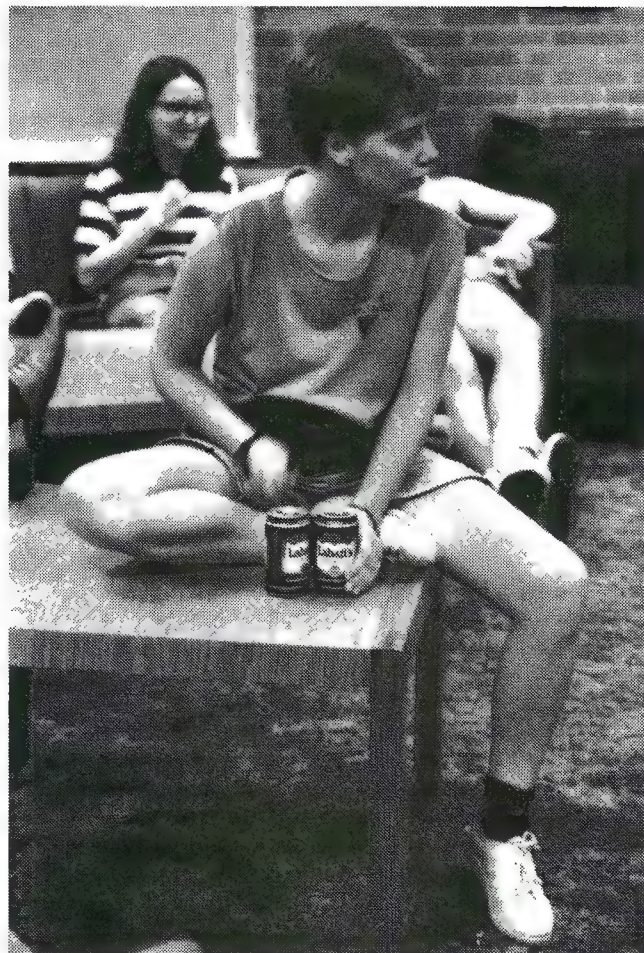
Then she was gone.

**W**e stood waist deep in the water, silent and waiting. In front of us, Diggy's floating bier of woven rushes was already tugging against our hands. The eastern sky was lightly touched with orange. This time yesterday I was feeling Diggy's breath on the back of my hand, laughing at my stupid dreams and noticing that her face was still plump with girl fat. It would never become lean and womanly now. I would never know what sort of woman Diggy would have become or would have chosen to love. And I would never know what had happened to her knife. There were so many things I would never know now.

Slowly, the water turned to fire; the tugging grew stronger. By my side, Fin looked serene; young and wise. Her hands were still and steady on the thick green stems. We had laid old Will on the front.

The bier tugged sharply. It was time. Without a word, we let it go and watched as it drifted eastward, down the path of the sun. Then I was humming a tune. Just a silly little thing. Diggy used to sing it to herself when she played. It was a catchy tune, easy to learn. Fin took it up for me when the melody was stifled by my tears, opening her throat to send Diggy on her way to the sea with a familiar song. As the bier drifted out of sight over the horizon, she raised both arms in salute. My infinitely precious Fin.

Close, but not touching, we walked back towards the barn and the other women; my family now. All the way there we hummed that tune, Diggy's tune. The seagod had her now.



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Nicola Griffith wrote "Mirrors and Burnstone" (IZ 25), which has since been reprinted in our fourth anthology. She points out that female contributors to *Interzone* rarely divulge their ages, and has not told us her own (but she's in her twenties, we'd guess). An erstwhile resident of Hull, she has recently moved to America and is continuing to write copiously. Her fantasy stories "The Other" and "The Voyage South" appear in the G.W. Books "Warhammer" anthologies *Ignorant Armies* (1989) and *Red Thirst* (1990).

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## WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letter column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.



# GREAT CHAIN of BEING

## Matthew Dickens

**B**ecause he was highly sought-after, and received many calls, Stein had designed his own means of dealing with them. A small computer took the calls, and channelled them into an electronic limbo, until Stein was ready to talk. It could even assign each call a level of urgency. That morning, there were so many A1-urgent calls the machine's circuits nearly fused.

He picked up the phone and pressed a button at random.

"Stein! Get the hell down here right away! We got a disaster on our hands!"

Stein recognized the voice: its owner always sounded as though he were speaking from an electric chair. It was Dreckhausen, head of Information Systems at Mega-Micro, his corporate ex-employers. Stein reached for another button, hoping to find a more congenial caller.

"MOVE IT!" screamed Dreckhausen.

Sighing, Stein replaced the handset. Simpler not to argue. After all, as top anti-software-virus expert in the country, he could afford to be generous to old friends.

As soon as Stein walked into Central Operations, Dreckhausen grabbed him and dragged him over to the nearest terminal. "Look!" he yelled.

The screen was a riot of clashing colours, like some electronic surrealist artwork. A message stood defiantly centre-screen. It read:

**YOU HAVE BEEN BUGGED!**

"Ninety per cent are like this!" Dreckhausen was still screaming. "It's a goddam virus! Our machines have been infected! You gotta do something, or —"

Stein could feel a migraine waiting, as it were, in the wings of his brain. He held up a hand.

"Hold it, hold it. If you've picked up a new virus, and you want me to isolate it, you'll have to speak more softly. In fact, preferably go away altogether."

The information head made a visible effort to get a grip on himself. "It's those IBM bastards," he croaked. "They did this to us. Ever since we swiped that Inter-Net contract from under their asses they've been doing us down. I want you to get those shitty virus-codes off our circuits, and send them to the lab, and we'll mutate them and —"

Dreckhausen was working himself up again. Stein's migraine took its cue. Talk of corporate war always upset him, and when it was fought with software viruses, it was worst of all. Biological warfare among carbon-based life forms was bad enough, but among silicon-based ones it was obscene.

Probably no-one had meant things to turn out as

they had, reflected Stein, suddenly wistful. It had started with a few hackers slipping rogue programs into the circuits of a mainframe, just for kicks, perhaps — and now there was a whole industry and counter-industry, writing (or should it be breeding?) computer viruses and anti-viruses. It had doubtless been the work of a moment to slip the original virus (the Creeper, wasn't it? Or the Sneaker?) into the entrails of some torpid silicon giant, one dark night. But once there, it had proved harder to eradicate than to propagate. Those early viruses had done just as Stein himself had done: gone freelance. Later, more sophisticated programs (or strains), and their bastard offspring, had threatened to turn the computers of half the world into plague-zones, silicon swamps of binary fevers. Stein made a living curing sick mainframes. He wished he could feel complacent about the set-up, as most of his colleagues did, but somehow the subject filled him with gloom at the same time as it made him rich.

"Is No around?" Stein inquired. Dreckhausen scowled. "He's on his way. Look: I want this —"

"I'll keep you informed of any progress. Thanks for your help, Dreck."

Stein turned to the screen. He could have spent all day admiring the crazed graphics: a van Gogh, trapped in the circuits. He cleared screen, and began to look for the skew.

"How's the patient?"

Stein turned to see Pete No, anti-virus chief at Mega-Micro. "It hasn't been spitting blood. What do you know about all this?"

"Only that we're not the only ones to have been infected. I've heard unofficial reports that IBM have suffered some crashes, and so have other companies, plus private users. It isn't choosy, this Bug."

Stein stared at the screen. "You think it's fresh off someone's lab-machine?"

No looked dubious. "Maybe. But I hear reports that most companies are having second thoughts about the tactical wisdom of viral warfare; the long-term risks of a virus going rogue outweigh near enough any short-term corporate advantage."

"So it's a mutation?"

Pete No nodded. "Looks like it to me. Born and bred in some file with an Irretrievable hold set. No knowing how long its been honing its talents."

An unfamiliar feeling — a shiver — touched Stein. *Honing its talents...* He knew the idea was too fanciful for a tech-man, but the words made him think of an assassin. He reached for his code-book — his medical manual, as he thought of it.



"I'm running a breakdown," he mumbled. "To see if this Bug contains any first- or second-degree resemblance to any known virus. If it does maybe we can squash it with an existing serum. Modified, if necessary."

"OK. I'll get down to the lab; I set the taskforce to analyze the Bug's reproduction patterns. Maybe they've found something by now."

Pete left. Stein sat, left respectfully alone by the M-M techs, trying, almost tenderly, to find a way into the scrambled matrix of the computer's brain, resisting the temptation to murmur to it softly, as to an autistic child.

**T**he news agencies were usually reluctant to broadcast stories of software-virus outbreaks, because such reports always sent the stock-market tumbling; but they were finding it increasingly difficult to play down the Bug. A week had passed, and every day more computers went down with it. The public were becoming worried, vociferously so.

Stein sat at his personal terminal. He could have used any machine in the world, probably, but whenever possible he preferred to take the work home instead of sitting in deserted offices. His machine was shielded with every anti-viral program available, plus several of his own design. He was studying the Bug.

He had discovered how it infiltrated its victims. Apparently, the Bug (which he had not yet been able to isolate in its totality) sent out small mini-programs – "scouts," he had christened them – which entered the target computer's circuits. What happened next was a little unclear. The scouts seemed to attune themselves to certain patterns existing within the victim's program, and, by some unfathomable process, imitated, or copied these. In this way, the scouts effected a strange bond between themselves and the victim – analogous to a symbiotic relationship. Then, the scouts appeared to flash a signal to the Bug proper, which hovered in the limbo state by means of which computers exchanged data, and it would automatically enter the victim's circuits on every level of functioning, causing total program-failure.

Stein had never encountered such an invidious mode of infiltration before. He could not work out to what extent it was all a pre-determined pattern whose basic format did not vary, or whether there were elements in it which could be applied flexibly – that is, at the whim of the Bug. For instance, how did the Bug decide when to move into the victim? Was it a reflex-response which occurred every time the scouts got into their advanced positions? Or could the Bug hang back, bide its time, for some more propitious moment?

A software virus with whims. A whimsical Bug which bided its time. Stein realized that, yet again, he had fallen into the enticing trap of thinking of the viruses as human.

But the scouts – a trick like that was so human. Like a general sending out commandos to reconnoitre a planned battle-zone. Or like the pimp who sends out his girl to seduce, then swipes the seducee's credit cards while he's busy. That sexual analogy appealed to Stein's sense of the grotesque. He had often envisaged the transfer of software viruses from system to system as being akin to the passing of venereal disease among humans. But now a virus that seduced its

machine, as well as dosing it?

Stein studied the dissected codes of the Bug, glimmering faintly on his screen. He was trying to learn how it reproduced itself. All the techs at M-M had been able to tell him was that it did not do so by looping. This was a relatively primitive mode of self-copying used by the early viruses. The virus simply set up a closed loop in its program which repeated itself indefinitely, copying the basic structure of the virus with each loop. For someone like Stein, it was easy to break the loop series, thus thwarting the virus. But the Bug was more sophisticated than that.

On impulse, Stein hit the Representation key. This was an innovation of his own, whose function was to offer a simulated representation of how the virus actually operated. It was based upon the analogizing method so dear to Stein, and he found it helped him to conceptualize the virus more effectively than a simple string of binary could.

A delicate hieroglyph glowed onto the screen: two curling strands of pixels, interweaving with one another. The strands were linked together at intervals. The program advanced, projecting the transformations of this viral cipher, in its self-reproduction. A shadowy blob appeared, and the twin strands separated. The linking struts between the strands began to move in a mysterious and ghostly choreography, apparently directed by a second, similar blob.

Stein watched as the process repeated itself, over and over. Watching, a vague memory stirred in him, of a TV programme on DNA which he had once watched. The processes of the Bug's self-replication, unfolding before him on the screen, bore a striking resemblance to the remembered TV simulation of DNA reproduction. The similarity was somewhat crude, admittedly – but that could well be the fault of the program; in essence, if the representation was at all accurate, the self-replication of the Bug could hardly be differentiated from that of human DNA. The twin strands formed a perfect double-helix; the linkages between the strands were the nucleotides holding the genetic instructions; the two blobs were respectively – he frowned with the effort of recall – the helicase and DNA polymerase which supervised the process. Stein blinked. The miracle of life, reproduced by a software virus.

Stein swivelled his chair convulsively away from the VDU. He closed his eyes. Pale after-images of double-helices floated ghostily on the dark screens of his sealed eyelids. He heaved himself to his feet, and went to phone Pete No.

**"H**ere's the papers, Mr Stein."

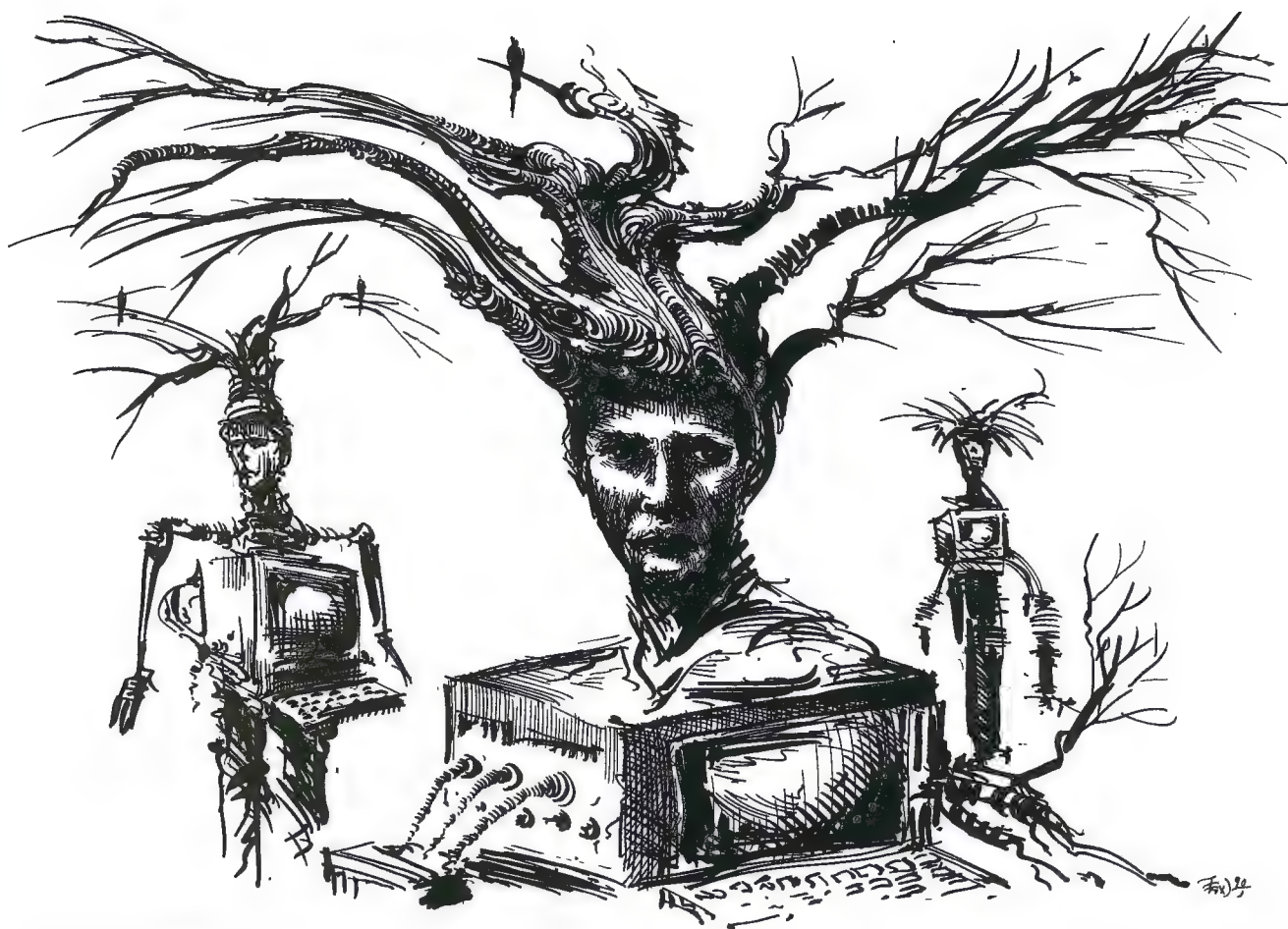
Stein turned away from the screen, and peered, with eyes bleary from squinting all night at a display that was probably badly adjusted, at Schmalz, one of Mega-Micro's top programmers, tossing a couple of newspapers onto the bench top.

Pete No picked one up, opened it, and turned to the cartoons. He folded the front page over, and Stein saw that it bore a laconic headline in six-inch type: **EPIDEMIC!**

"Are you guys getting anywhere?" inquired Schmalz.

"Could be. These labs of yours aren't very well ventilated, though. If they'd built them above ground I





could have opened a window."

"Well, what progress are you making?" demanded Schmalz. "Virtually all the machines are down; how am I supposed to do my job? I got nothing to do except make coffee and deliver newspapers. Can't you come up with something?"

No chuckled at Herbert Pervert. For a fleeting moment, Stein felt a rush of claustrophobia at the stuffiness of the room, the stagnancy of the whole situation. "It's not as simple as you seem to think," he answered. "This thing behaves like an organic virus. Yes, we talk about counter-programs and circuit defumigators as vaccines, or antigens, but this time that's literally what we need. We have to write a program that is genuinely analogous to a vaccine. To do that I'd need a professional knowledge of medicine, biochemistry, all that stuff – and I don't have it. I've already asked Dreck to find me someone, a medic, who's trained in computer science too. You see the problem? I have to formulate a vaccine, or antibiotic, whatever, as if the Bug were a virus that attacked humans, then *analogize* it to fit the real state of affairs. And that isn't easy."

Schmalz's mouth quirked briefly into a little moue of disdain, not sympathy, and he slouched out of the lab. Stein reached for the other newspaper, and began to read about how the country (and other countries too, it seemed) were in the grip of a deadly computer virus calling itself "the Bug."

**N**ext morning, Dreckhausen marched into the lab, told Pete No to go home, and then turned to Stein and said: "Allow me to introduce

your new partner: Bridget Frances Trahearn. She's a doctor who's done frontline work on computers in medicine. We think she may be able to help you come up with the antidote. You've seen the latest gen in the papers? You're not the only brains working on this thing; but we'd like Mega-Micro to be the people who squash this Bug. We'd like to be hailed as the saviours of mankind. And naturally, besides the – what can I say? – *immeasurable* humanitarian rewards, you'll also both pick up big bonuses from us. So I'll leave you to it – remember, you have access to anything that we can provide."

Dreckhausen turned, and strode out of the lab. Bridget moved across to the terminal at which Stein had been working.

"You know, I didn't volunteer for this job; someone sent your people my name." She frowned, and nodded at the terminal. "How do you keep this Bug-free?"

"Sometimes I don't," said Stein. "I shield them as best I can – but no prophylactic can be a hundred per cent guaranteed, can it? I've programmed all M-M's surviving machines with all the tried-and-tested protections I know, but every day a few more go down."

Bridget Frances seated herself at his terminal. She seemed oddly abstracted. "Yes, it's a very promiscuous Bug..."

Stein felt a faint surprise. He had assumed that he was the only one who thought in such dubious metaphors. Perhaps medics were less stolid than techs. Don't generalize, he told himself.

She looked at him, and seemed to intuit his thoughts. "I often find myself thinking in analogies like that. Don't you?"



"Sometimes."

"I think you should try and cultivate it. It helps you see things, relations, which you might otherwise have overlooked. And in this particular case, it could be very helpful indeed – as I'm sure you've guessed. For instance, I expect you're aware of the resemblance between the Bug's mode of reproducing itself and that of DNA?"

Stein nodded, a little nonplussed. "I don't know what to make of it. One minute this virus looks like one thing, the next something else. It doesn't seem to have any single clear form; it's a mish-mash..."

"If you want an analogy, I'd have said it's like a chimera."

"I...suppose so. How do you fight a chimera?"

"I remember reading an account somewhere. A fifteenth century Dutch philosopher-alchemist called, I think, Jan van Haase. How did that treatise go...? Oh, yes, one should prepare a concoction of aqua fortis, salt and powdered aragonite, mix it with mud, and then have a strong man hurl the mixture at the chimera's eyes. He cites examples of cases where the procedure has been effective."

Stein stared at her in bewilderment. This girl sounded more like an aged, erudite history professor than a scientist. "That's fascinating," he said levelly, "but will it help us find an antidote for the Bug?"

"Perhaps. If we can make our own concoction, as van Haase suggests." She returned his stare. "Do you think I'm being ridiculous – playing childish games with words? You think, Why the hell is she, a scientist, talking about some forgotten Renaissance mystic?"

Stein said nothing. He was careful to keep his mind blank, too.

"Maybe the reason we've all failed to beat this sly, seductive, whimsical little virus is because we're not thinking right. Sorry to bore you, but this happens to be an interest of mine. During the Renaissance, people thought in a completely different way to the way we think now. They found analogies for everything: so a person's eyes were stars, their bones were rocks, their hair, grass. Everything had an affinity with something else. They called this the Great Chain of Being, and they believed it stretched from the lowest plants and animals to God. What I suppose I mean, Dave (they told me your name), is that this Bug isn't scientifically minded; it seems to work by finding analogies – its way of self-replication, the way it invades computers' circuits like an army led by a cunning strategist; it "thinks," or acts in a way analogous to thinking, like a Renaissance humanist. Except that, as far as we're concerned, its more of an antihumanist. God only knows how it evolved – for all the signs are that it mutated to its present form, we don't think anyone would have deliberately introduced it...Maybe it absorbed a few megabytes of info, on DNA, and military strategy, and marital-aid books on how to seduce your own husband, then related the data to its own case. I'm just speculating wildly. Try it sometime."

Bridget got up, briskly, and looked around. "I'd better go and find myself a terminal," she said. "See you around."

She moved away along the rows of lab-computers, looking for one that was still healthy. Stein's jaded eye followed her a way, then he sat down heavily before his machine and returned to his work.

**H**ours later, Stein was driving home for a rest. He remembered that he had to buy some food, as his freezer was nearly empty.

He was about to turn off for the all-night supermarket, when he remembered he was out of cash too, and his plastic was at home. Sighing, Stein headed for his bank instead.

Parking the car, he walked over to the cashpoint, thinking someone should clean up the litter of cash receipts which a chilly breeze was causing to flutter across the pavement in dismal spirals. Absently, he fed in his card, punched his number, and stared at the clouds, faintly illuminated by the city's glare.

The machine whirled to itself, and thrust out a receipt. Stein glanced at it, as was his habit. Instead of the usual printout, there was just a single bald message on the slip:

#### **YOU HAVE BEEN BUGGED!**

While Stein was staring at the paper, the machine clicked, made a strange noise (analogous, perhaps, to a moan), and began to fire out more receipts, dozens, scores, a manic blizzard of paper. Stein staggered back, making unnecessary flailing movements with his arms. Abruptly, the flow of receipts ceased, and the cash machine seemed to enter a sort of post-coital triste. Heart beating too fast, Stein approached the machine again. The screen displayed the same message as the receipts. Stein waited a few moments, without much hope, for his card to be returned. It was not. Nor had the machine seen fit to dispense him any cash. The perspex cover slid smoothly down over the machine, and it redisplayed the innocuous message,

#### **WELCOME TO AUTOBANK PLEASE INSERT YOUR CARD**

Stein drove home.

Wearily, he went through the tiresome series of key turnings necessary to open his front door. He wandered into the kitchen and rummaged in the freezer for a pizza he suspected he had. It was past its sell-by, but Stein tossed it in the microwave and went to the bathroom. When he returned, it was almost ready; the display measured the seconds, 5...4...3...2...1...

A bizarre cacophony jerked Stein from his reverie. It was the microwave. Normally, it uttered a little "ping" when it had finished its program, but now it seemed to be extemporizing some avant-garde melody, full of tension and discord. Stein listened to it, eyes closed, though not in appreciation.

The microwave fell silent. Stein opened his eyes, noted the predictable message on the display, and resignedly opened the oven door.

The pizza was smeared messily around the interior of the machine. Stein slipped a morsel of tomato that had fused with a morsel of onion into his mouth, and chewed.

Then he lay on the couch and stared blearily at the cobwebbed ceiling. He stayed awake just long enough to observe that his digital watch had also been Bugged, then fell asleep.

**O**n the way to the lab the next morning, Stein bought a paper, strangely anxious to see what the press had to say about the latest wave of the epidemic.

It had caused some consternation, indeed – but there was better news: an antidote was apparently in



the offing. Researchers at Xtech, Silicon Valley, claimed to have developed a silicon antibody, which acted in the same way as an antibody like the leucocyte, which was to be found in the bloodstreams of humans. The "antibody," in reality a sophisticated computer program, would be inputted to all affected machines, which would then, all being well, be cured. The article described how antibodies worked in people, and said that the silicon antibodies would operate according to similar principles. All the excited talk of "electrochemical warfare," which some had seen as the only way of eradicating the Bug, could now be laid to rest. The epidemic (by now it was more of a pandemic) would soon be under control.

Stein felt better. He found Bridget in the lab, and showed her the encouraging article. She shrugged, and reached for a paper of her own. She opened it, and handed it silently to Stein.

#### NEURAL COMPUTERS SUCCUMB TO BUG [he read]

"Yesterday, a number of special neural computers, whose design is based upon that of the human brain, went down with the notorious 'Bug' computer virus. Neural computers operate by electronic chips which emulate the neurons of the human brain; they are the part of the brain in which the intelligence lies. When thought takes place, the neurons cause patterns to be 'fired' around the neural networks – patterns which conform to cognitive processes such as recognizing a face. Somehow the Bug infiltrated several of the government's largest neural computers, causing them to have what were effectively mental breakdowns. With even neural computers now at risk, serious questions are raised as to how security can continue to be maintained, in a world that is fast heading towards a computer-free future..."

Stein stopped reading. He returned the newspaper.

"Versatile, isn't it?" remarked Bridget. "I imagine you can guess what its next step will be?"

Stein didn't want to try and guess. A horrible analogy was forming in his mind, between the human brain, and neural computers, which resembled human brains. And not content, the scientist in him had to make the logical connection: neural computers were analogous to human brains; the Bug had infiltrated neural computers; ergo...

"One thing mystifies me," commented Bridget. "What will the Bug do when it's taken over the minds of the human race? I mean, the machines it's infected; it's not as if they've taken on some life of their own. They're inactive, to all intents and purposes. They still give spectacular graphic displays, but no more. What does the Bug want with them? Were they just stepping stones on the way to mastering *homo sapiens*? I won't believe the Bug just wants to exist passively in the circuits, or neural pathways, of computers or humans; its too expansionist for that. It must have some grand design – but what?"

Now it was Stein who shrugged. He hoped, earnestly, that Bridget was taking her academic interests to an extreme. He wandered nervously over to one of the most recent computers to fall sick, and stared at the crescendos of graphic virtuosity blossoming around the ubiquitous legend, **YOU HAVE BEEN BUGGED!**

Bridget was pursuing her speculations. "Perhaps it'll remould our brains entirely so that we become

walking, organic computers...human robots...soft machines. Or perhaps we'll enter a symbiotic relationship – silicon and carbon based life-forms existing in perfect harmony. *Homo siliconis*... Perhaps the Bug will allow us to enter into consciousness with every creature, plant and machine on Earth, through the process of analogic rapport. We'd achieve the perfect oneness that the Renaissance mind conceived of – a tapestry of organisms, resembling each other endlessly. An infinite affinity. A Great Chain of Being."

"We'd better get away from here," said Stein, suddenly. "The Bug – it could enter our minds at any moment, from any one of these terminals."

Bridget seemed not to have heard him. Her dreamy expression had faded, and had been replaced by one of breathless anticipation. Her eyes reflected the light emanating from the display; the affinity, the resemblance, with the machine was quite manifest.

Stein began to run, stumbling over dusty boxes of software that would never now be loaded, once entangling his feet in a chaotic mess of printout, spewed up no doubt by some forgotten machine, and never folded away. He reached the stairs, and began to climb, panting, out of condition, then staggered through the deserted offices, until he reached the open air, and sunlight.

Stein sat beneath a tree on a low hill that overlooked the city. It was drizzling unromantically. There ought to be a spectacular sunset, he thought listlessly, for purposes of symbolism.

Around him were miles of ploughed fields. He would have to keep a look-out for combine harvesters, and other potential vectors.

He wondered what he should do. By now, the Bug would be penetrating the minds of men and woman right across the planet, an orgy of man and machine, of global proportions. Should he join it? It would be easy to stroll down to the city, there to surrender himself to the wiles of the Bug. Down there, the human race was entering a second Renaissance.

What was the alternative? To remain a fugitive for the rest of his life? Where could he go that would be free of machines? And if the Bug did indeed, as the erstwhile Bridget had suggested, subtly take control of every organism on Earth, then there was nowhere he would be safe.

Something within Stein clung to the notion of being human – probably more from habit than from any deep-rooted idealism, or genuine attachment to the species. How would a virus perceive reality? Would it experience emotions? Did viruses die, or would the Bug be a means of attaining the ancient human dream of immortality?

So many questions! Probably, viruses did not bother themselves with questions. A twinge of hunger reminded Stein that he had not eaten for – how long? He looked at his watch –

– His watch! He hadn't bothered to take it off last night. Suddenly terrified, Stein tore off the watch, and hurled it away. He realized that, after all, he wanted to stay human.

Stein leaned against the tree, feeling oddly giddy. He looked up at the branches, the spreading foliage. He felt a sudden strange affinity with this tree – how wonderful to be a tree, stretching branches up to the



sunlight, and roots down to the earth's richness.

He began to try, with his whole being, to understand the tree, to grasp it through some process whose name he could no longer recall, but which lay deep in his very cells. His feeling of hunger increased, but soon, he knew, he would be able to refresh himself as the tree did, with sun, and air and water. As the human being studied the tree being, his lips formed a meaningless epitaph,

**YOU HAVE BEEN BUGGED!**

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**Matthew Dickens**, born 1969, is this magazine's youngest-ever contributor. (Even so, he was 20 when he wrote the above story; where are all our teenage hopefuls?) He's a final-year student at Southampton University and has also contributed sf stories to the little magazines *Back Brain*, *Recluse* and *Works*. He is currently planning to publish his own magazine, *Splinter*, and to write a book "about ancient irreligious cults and mass psychosis, 90s-style."

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# interzone

## BACK ISSUES

All back issues except Nos. 1, 5 and 7 are still available from 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton, BN1 6LU, UK. They are £2.30 each (£2.50 each overseas). Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone*. Contents of recent back issues:

**22:** "The Only One" by David S. Garnett; Interviews with J.G. Ballard and K.W. Jeter; "The Decline of Sunshine" by Cherry Wilder; "The Boys" by Charles Stross; "Memories of the Body" by Lisa Tuttle; "Among the Wounded" by Christopher Burns; "The Good Robot" by SMS; "The Girl Who Died for Art" by Eric Brown.

**23:** "The Giving Plague" by David Brin; "Karl and the Ogre" by Paul J. McAuley; Interview with Karen Joy Fowler; "Artefacts" by Christopher Evans; "Famous Monsters" by Kim Newman; "Something for Nothing" by S.M. Baxter; "Scatter My Ashes" by Greg Egan.

**24:** "The Growth of the House of Usher" by Brian Stableford; "Heartland" by Karen Joy Fowler; Interview with Thomas M. Disch; "The Time-Lapsed Man" by Eric Brown; "Animator" by Alex Stewart; "Lux in Tenebris" by Phillip Mann; "Salvage" by Julio Buck Abrera; plus Charles Platt on Britain, etc.

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**26:** "Dark Night in Toyland" by Bob Shaw; "Wyrd Sisters" by Terry Pratchett; Interview with Leigh Kennedy; "Face Lift" by Susan Beetstone; "Stop Evolution in Its Tracks!" by John Sladek; Christopher Priest disagreeing with Charles Platt; "Big Trouble Upstairs" by Eric Brown; "The Agony of Suburban Knowledge" by Johnny Black; "In the Dream-Time" by Charles Stross; plus Clute, McAuley and Stableford.

**27:** "Tommy Atkins" by Barrington J. Bayley; Roz Kaveney on Brian Stableford; "To the Letter" by Bob Shaw; "Before I Wake" by Kim Stanley Robinson; J.G. Ballard on his favourite sf movies; "Driving Through Korea" by Ian Lee; Interview with Kathy Acker; "An Eye in Paradise" by John Brosnan; "Soft Clocks" by Yoshio Aramaki.

**28:** "The Jonah Man" by S.M. Baxter; Interview with Ramsey Campbell; "Meeting the Author" by Campbell; "Twitch Technicolor" by Kim Newman; "The Outside Door" by Lyle Hopwood; "Visiting the Dead" by William King; "Chaos Surfari" by Rudy Rucker & Marc Laidlaw; plus Stableford, Platt, etc.

**29:** "The Cutie" by Greg Egan; "Game Night at the Fox & Goose" by Karen Joy Fowler; Interview with Michael Moorcock; "An Old-Fashioned Story" by Phillip Mann; "Cronus" by Marianne Puxley; Interview with Lisa Tuttle; "The Men's Room" by Garry Kilworth; "Green-Eyed Monstera" by Andrew Ferguson; "The Magic Bullet" by Brian Stableford; plus Thomas M. Disch, etc.

**30:** "Once Upon a Time in the Park" by Ian Lee; "The Enormous Space" by J.G. Ballard; Brian Stableford on Douglas Adams; "City of Peace" by Lisa Goldstein; "Adrenotropic Man" by Keith Brooke; "The Storeroom of Lost Desire" by Josef Nesvadba; Interview with John Sladek; "Kingfisher" by Sylvia M. Siddall; "Through" by Ian R. MacLeod; plus Clute, Lowe, etc.

**31:** "Star-Crystals and Karmel" by Eric Brown; "Gravegoods" by Gwyneth Jones; Interview with C.J. Cherryh; "Raft" by S.M. Baxter; "Generation Gap" by Charles Stross; "Other Edens" by John Gribbin; Interview with Stephen Gallagher; "Not Even Ashes" by Jamil Nasir; plus McAuley, Platt, etc.

**32:** "Mosquito" by Richard Calder; "The Sculptor's Hand" by Nicholas Royle; Brian Stableford on Stephen Donaldson; "The Death of Arlett" by Barrington Bayley; "The New Jerusalem PLC" by Lee Montgomerie; Interview with Michael Coney; "Green and Pleasant Land" by David Redd; "Listen" by Ian McDonald; etc. etc.

**33:** "Piecework" by David Brin; "Gargantuabots vs. the Nice Mice" by Kim Newman; John Clute on Terry Pratchett; "The Panic Hand" by Jonathan Carroll; "The Last Game" by Sharon M. Hall; Interview with Geoff Ryman; "The Eye of the Ayatollah" by Ian Watson; "Familiars" by Stuart Falconer; etc.



# A Sperm Called Trilogy

## John Clute

I am reading Octavia Butler and I see a sperm whose name is *Trilogy*. Its head is called *Dawn* (1987), its midriff is called *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and its tail is called *Imago* (Warners, \$16.95; Gollancz, £12.95). As a whole, it answers to the title of *Xenogenesis Trilogy*. More than most trilogies, *Xenogenesis Trilogy* resembles a giant sperm in that almost all of its substance has gone to its head, it is afflicted with a wasting palsy in its lower member, and it is all about breeding. *Dawn* is big and muscular and packed with information; *Adulthood Rites* is smooth and transparent and slopes gracefully towards the diminishing musculature of the tail; and *Imago* is slight, vermiform and squiggly. *Xenogenesis Trilogy*, it is fair to say, rather fails to come to a climax. Perhaps it's too bad I couldn't say I was reading Octavia Butler and I saw a dumb-bell whose name was Sextet.

Perhaps someday I will.

Because there's something very odd indeed about *Xenogenesis*, whose first volume was originally described (by both its American and British publishers) as the beginning of a series, with no total number of instalments indicated, though by the time we saw volume three both publishers were hyping *Imago* as a "stunning climax to the trilogy" (Warner's version). As it now stands, then, *Xenogenesis* slides remorselessly into the suicidal nadir of *Imago*'s final pages without hope of sequel, and in the absence of any privy knowledge to the contrary, we must "honour" what Butler's publishers are telling us. If Butler had in fact conceived those final pages as a still centre, as an eye in the storm, then she should have insisted upon our not being told different in the hype; as it stands, her readers have been put into the slightly invidious position of attempting to make a kind of sense of *Imago* that its author may not have intended. On the other hand, perhaps Butler simply became fatigued; the fault lines running through *Xenogenesis* might have had a toxic effect upon her imagination, so that she found herself abandoning sperm halfway through the passage.

For problems there certainly are; they boil down to one central difficulty. This difficulty, which is shared by many of the most ambitious writers of American science fiction, lies in a failure to mediate between the telling of structured speculative thought (a project of central engendering importance for writers like Butler, Tiptree, Bear, Benford) and the generic mix of plot and setting and character-creation through which they find themselves articulating that impulse to tell thoughts. Indeed, it might be argued that they are writers whose speculative thoughts can only be expressed through

the liberating estrangements of genuine science fiction. Science fiction gives one to think. With one bound she was free. But that's not the whole story, of course.

Science fiction, as it is allowed expression through the creation of books publishable in the American market, is by no means a free lunch. It binds as it liberates. Thoughts soar in the mind's eye of the science-fiction writer, but then they must be told. Plots must be crafted to expose the *donnée* without unduly obscuring the visibility of the action which marks science fiction as a "popular literature" whose roots lie deep in the Romance mode. Visible action means visible landscape – i.e. a terrain of exemplary simplicity, whose weather is governed by metaphysical pathos. Visible action also means visible actors – protagonists we can recognize across a crowded room of extras, and whose moral qualities we can register (and be on the side of) in the very heart of the tourney. Protagonists must not, therefore, seem ineradicably alien, or ambivalent, or passive; and if they have moments of introspection, these moments must generate some move that turns the tale. Every characteristic the protagonist shows must ultimately be seen as a form of empowerment prop. Like a mask – visible, but easy to see through – the protagonist must be all act. Because mere being is fathomless.

*Dawn* almost perfectly fuses thought-telling and the Romance mode. The premise may be familiar to any reader of Robert Ardey or Konrad Lorenz – the human race is a kind of portmanteau monstrosity, a fatal mix of unshackled intelligence and hierarchical/territorial imperatives – but it is laid down by Butler with an unbending and severe clarity that brooks no real dissent. Certainly within the texts of *Xenogenesis* no countervailing voice is allowed anywhere near the mike (one man in *Dawn* – Lilith's first lover – might have represented that voice in a different book, but in *Dawn* he is soon killed). The premise, in other words, takes on the hard fixity of an axiom. And for a while – for at least

the whole length of *Dawn*, and for much of *Adulthood Rites* – this axiomatic fixity works very well.

As *Dawn* begins, humanity has indeed managed to destroy itself in some sort of final war and rape of the planet. Only a few waif biota survive, men and women rescued by the spacefaring Oankali, who have happened upon Earth in the nick of time. These Oankali – who lust for new genes in the same way that humans lust for dominance – travel through space in vast living ships in a constant search for new biological material to engage with in the most intimate fashion possible, by breeding into the new stock, transforming themselves in the process. In the first sections of *Dawn*, Lilith awakens after 250 years of broken slumber, and begins to find out how the non-hierarchical, three-sexed, tendrilled and odorous Oankali plan to deal with the axiomatic flaw that curses her species. Love is the plan. She will become part of an Oankali-human marriage. Her children will be of all sorts. She will lead her people back to a terraformed Earth, and abide there for a spell. Then the new species, once imago stage has been reached, will re-enter its proper domain, which is interstellar space; and go once more about its proper business, which is exogamy.

So far so good. *Adulthood Rites* takes us back to Earth, and there the problems begin. Many humans, on being awoken by their rescuers, have violently refused to have any truck with the saintly Oankali, who in turn refuse to make them fertile once again, though they do permit a (seemingly unending) stream of them to re-settle on the home planet. But only for a little while. For reasons which have everything to do with the exigencies of pulp plotting and nothing at all to do with good sense, it turns out that after using new planets as nurseries, the Oankali then strip them down for raw material before departing, so that soon there will be no Earth for the refusenik humans to live on. All of which is, of course, an utter load of bollocks. We have already been told Oankali have



visited many previous planets. Do they destroy all of them, even those not already turned to a cinder by natives? (Of course not.) We have already been told that Oankali are capable of terraforming Mars. Would a terraformed but otherwise uninhabited planet provide the necessary raw material for the next caper? (Of course it would.) And so on.

**T**his puerile pulp plotting governs the larger actions in both *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*, which repeats much of the plot of its sibling, without adding a single new idea; and is further underscored by the tricks Butler finds herself getting up to in the final volume through her need to supply us punters with a suitable protagonist to sink our hooks into. Lilith has faded into the background (and certain feminist arguments of real cogency have faded with her); the protagonist of *Adulthood Rites*, a human-Oankali male child who spends much of the book learning about unaltered humans in the wild, is succeeded in *Imago* by a human-Oankali ooloi, a member of the central gene-manipulating pheromone-emitting third sex, who spends much of the book learning about unaltered humans in the wild.

"It" tells its own story, in an identikit voice, only differing from the rest of the cast by the huge number of empowerment props it bears — unctuousness; cloying empathy; two hearts and tendrils à la Slan; a shapechanging option; a self-healing option, which it can apply to others by sort of sucking them; a range of pheromones that renders it capable of zapping (and allowing it to fuck) every human on the planet; and much much more. It is Jommy Cross and Paul Muad'ib and Mother Theresa in a rubber suit with suckers. I do not in fact believe it is what Octavia Butler can possibly intend to transform her premise into. I do not in fact believe that *Xeno-genesis* can possibly be meant to end here, in this lame squiggle. I believe that Butler has temporarily gotten pulped. So I am going to stop here. I am going to wait for the dumb bell.

## Lo Tek Paul J. McAuley

**F**rom *Downbelow Station* onwards, C.J. Cherryh has been steadily shaping a future history steeped in the tropes of traditional space opera. It's a universe in which trade is the *raison d'être*: serviced by huge way stations, merchant ships zip from mass point to mass point faster than the speed of light; even aliens fit right into the merchant ethic. Meanwhile, two would-be empires, the Alliance and the Union,

circle each other warily, sundered from Earth yet still tied to her. Company wars culminate in setpiece battles between huge warships. And so on.

We all know the scenario, even those of us who never read space opera. Its residue has seeped into the groundwater of popular culture via *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. No doubt Terry Pratchett will soon serve up a delicious parody, trussed and stuffed. Parody apart, after Bruce Sterling's lovingly polished post-modernist number in *Schismatrix*, it seems as if there is nothing new to be wrenched from space opera's Golden Age machinery. And yet Cherryh manages to do just that time and again, by using a pared-down gritty realism to depict the lives of ordinary people caught in the toils and coils of history. *Rimrunners* (New English Library, £12.95) takes this workerist attitude to extremes, and does it extremely well.

It's the story of Elizabeth Yeager, a soldier from the losing side of a company war, trapped behind enemy lines and stuck on a marginal trading station in the boondocks. Yeager is homeless, jobless and starving, and yet not without hope, and certainly not without pride. All she wants is a berth on a ship, any ship. No other job is good enough. Cherry makes Yeager's plight vivid, immediate, and true. When a man tries to rape Yeager she has to kill him; when another takes advantage of her and then threatens betrayal, she kills him too (she is, after all, trained to kill). So when the next ship comes she has to find a berth on it, even if it is the kind of ship that will take on someone with a murder charge hanging over her, a ship that turns out to be a rimrunner, a patrol ship dedicated to tracking down the remnants of the defeated fleet on which Yeager served.

This is space opera stripped down to its chassis, the usual widescreen effects compressed to the narrowest possible aperture. We know only what Elizabeth Yeager knows. Space battles are reduced to sudden shifts of gravity in the service corridors in the bowels of the ship and scuttlebutt rumours about the motives of the officers and of the captain, mysterious and remote as a God and glimpsed only twice in the whole narrative. There are no astounding revelations of superscience, and certainly none of the tropes of cyberpunk. *Rimrunners* is strictly lo tek. Yeager is nothing more than a mechanic; she fixes plumbing, works in a machine shop. The most complicated work she undertakes is mostly done with a screwdriver.

Likewise, the prose is starkly minimal, virtually transparent, and true (aside from a curious coyness that mostly elides fuck, substituting *hell* or *damn*, or even worse, *effing*), and filled with the casual brutality that has shaped Elizabeth Yeager. For hardware is not

the heart of this space opera. Instead, it is Yeager herself, her own secret history, how she must come to terms with her new shipmates yet not give herself away, the redemption she must work out for herself. Her obsessive paranoia informs everything she does and everything we know about the claustrophobic pocket universe of the ship; and it is the core of the dilemma she must eventually riddle to save herself.

And in the end, *Rimrunners* is not space opera at all. It is a story of dogged survival and rite of passage, of learning to love and to trust, of becoming human, that just for once is set aboard a spaceship. It is only because she works with such close and honest attention to detail that Cherryh makes that distinction matter.

**I**n *Ivory* (Legend, £12.95), Mike Resnick is also working against a backdrop of space opera Empire, the kind where one civilization, one culture, holds sway across the galaxy. It is the tale of the search for the largest pair of elephant tusks ever to have existed, taken from the Kilimanjaro Elephant in the nineteenth century, a tale which neatly frames a series of stories which could well have been excerpts from a tapestry of galactic history but which in the event are merely a series of old fashioned yarns in which the tusks are the only common factor.

The framing tale is a bloodless chain of deductive reasoning, consisting mostly of dialogue between an all-powerful computer and the obsessive archivist hired to do the search by a mysterious personage who styles himself the last of the Masai. Resnick may have been trying to counterpoint the sweat and blood of actual history with the Olympian viewpoint of the historian, whose office environment responds to his every whim, and who eventually gets his nose more or less literally rubbed in history's dirt; but unfortunately most of the snippets of history are as static as their frame. With one or two cardboard sets, most if not all the action occurring offstage and reported at length by the two or three performers, and corny snapper punchlines, they have the two-dimensional resonance of a low-budget TV series. Only the deftly handled mystery of the origin and intentions of the mysterious client injects any urgency into the plot, which could have been resolved, it turns out, at almost any time. Resnick, like Cherryh, knows how to tantalize by withholding essential information until just the right moment, and there are some neat evocations of Kenya, the only pieces in the patchwork which have any real life in them, but it isn't enough to redeem the cheap feel of the whole.

**C**reaky stuff, rather like the central concept of Michael P. Kube-McDowell's *Alternities* (Sphere, £3.99),



in which a way to travel between a limited number of parallel histories is discovered through an unexplained accident (did he fall or was he pushed?) by a corrupt, sadistic and thoroughly nasty U.S. Senator. After stumbling between one alternate universe and another, the Senator kills his counterpart and establishes a network of gateways and a shadowy organization of runners to exploit the commercial potential of the neighbouring alternities. Some deft footwork by Kube-McDowell saves the novel from its clichéd beginning. For one thing, none of the alternities are our own; for another, he resists the temptation to score cheap jokes; and in the "home" alternity, the United States is losing the Cold War to a more technologically sophisticated Russia, a scenario neatly evoked through allusion rather than expository lump.

The narrative alternates, as it were, between the growing *Weltschmerz* of a runner who travels between alternities to spy out any technology that might help against the Russians, and the conniving of politicians planning to use the alternities as a bolt hole if their deliberate escalation of hostilities against the Russians goes wrong. The runner's marriage is disintegrating and although, unlike most people, he has no counterpart in the other alternities, he no longer feels at home in the only one in which he was born. And the politicians find that their plans have taken on a momentum of their own, and the world begins to slide towards Armageddon. Kube-McDowell adeptly meshes personal and global crises, despite some fairly unbelievable real-politicking, but the whole concept never rises above the level of the sleazy industrial espionage to which travel between different realities is put. Hints that Something inhabits the space between alternities peter out into nothingness, and *Alternities* eventually chokes on its bleakness; rather than opening out its concepts, it consistently seeks closure, and eventually gets it.

**S**ecret histories seem to be the in thing. Clive Barker's *The Great and Secret Show* (Collins, £12.95) colonizes sunny Southern California with his own brand of nightmare, redolent of cloacal imagery and obsessive detailing of the slop of decay. There is, it seems, a secret Art known only to a few Adepts, who are able to divide the curtain between reality and the place where dreams are generated, variously known as the island, or Quiddity, or the Shoal. The plot, rambling, recursive and more complex than it needs to be, basically turns about the struggle between two Adepts, no longer quite human, and their various offspring (including a pair of starcrossed lovers and the self-styled Death-Boy), a struggle

which turns a small Southern Californian town into their battleground and opens a gate through which the Iad, creatures from beyond Quiddity and quite inimical to humanity, threaten to erupt. It's a neat scenario, starting promisingly in the U.S. Mail's dead-letter office in Omaha and strewn with vividly imagined set pieces and twisty notions as it builds towards an apocalyptic conclusion in the wreckage of the Californian Dream. Unfortunately, there are also great chunks of gobstopingly limp prose, abrupt shifts in narrative viewpoint, subplots which are thrown away and a hasty *deus ex machina* ending after which various survivors resolve to continue to search for the Art. And so we return to Omaha, hardly wiser, it turns out, than before. For although it weighs in at almost 700 pages, this is only the first *Book of the Art*. The heart sinks.

**I**'ve never been able to finish a novel by Tanith Lee, which is probably my own fault, so it's nice to be able to pick through a collection of no less than twenty of her short stories — *Forests of the Night* (Unwin Hyman, £12.95). Apart from a couple of science fantasies that go on for far too long about nothing in particular, it's a solid and varied collection, from the straightforward anger of the eco-disaster story "Crying in the Rain" to a clutch of fairy stories invested with Freudian insight, such as "Bloodmantle" and "La Reine Blanche": fresh and vivid art-deco psychodramas that are not a word too long.

## The Charts Paul Brazier

**B**ooks are important. If I tried to find my way around life on my own, I'd get lost. Books, for me, are the charts other people have drawn from their experience of life: they just might help me find my way. Evidently, some authors disagree, see these maps only as decorations, and so think invented maps would be just as useful. The worst of these pretend to guide while only distracting and amusing.

Anne Rice's *The Mummy* (Chatto, £12.95) is one such. It is much too long to read in one go. In the necessary leaving and returning to the book, I found myself reluctant to open it again. I simply wasn't interested.

Which is surprising, because this book raises the moral, intellectual and emotional problems of immortality. It depicts the revival to life in the 1920s of an ancient Egyptian who had Cleopatra as a lover, but was spurned by her in favour of Mark Antony. This mummy, immortal through no fault of his own, nevertheless has "the formula." He

offered it to Cleopatra in her own time, and she refused. In the 20th century, he uses it to revive her extensively-decayed remains, and she spends a lot of time lurching about with various bones sticking out. Although gruesome, this is the only interesting part of the story. There is a lot of agonizing over whether or not other living people should be given the gift of immortality, and this is redolent of Anne Rice's recent vampire novel, *Queen of the Damned*.

It also resembles that other novel in its determined inconclusiveness about these problems, sacrificing any attempt at insight to the God of the Sequel. And herein lies the cause of my ennui. I would like to recommend this book on the basis of its intellectually rigorous analysis of these pithy problems, but I can't: it hasn't got one. However, if you want to sympathize unthinkingly with/marvel at how other people and mummies react to them, while wallowing in a lavish Dennis Wheatley-like between-the-wars English upper-class social setting, then this is the book for you.

In contrast, *Toady* by Mark Morris (Piatkus, £12.95) might be a useful roadmap of the darker places which Anne Rice touches and shies away from. There is no cosy immortality here to agonize over. The characters learn, and change — and some die. They react to one another, care, try to help, make mistakes. Their biggest mistake provides the engine of the story. Four schoolboys hold a seance and release a presence which causes them to live out their own nightmares. I was particularly taken with the image of one of the central characters being pursued along a seaside pier by the snowman he had built that morning. The culmination of this is their descent into a kind of dark Narnia, in which they have adventures trying to escape while the final conflict takes place around their comatose bodies in the real world.

Unfortunately, it seems Mark Morris has read too many bad horror novels, and believes that there ought to be shock, splatter and nastiness every thirty pages. I did not enjoy the gruesome aspects of this book at all, although I believe they were well enough done to please those of you who do. But, considering the author's insight into human character, what finally makes the book grossly under-achieved is the inept grasp of language. The book opens thus: "The bell rang, and the school vomited screaming, laughing children into the playground." The cacophony of "vomited screaming" clanging against that "laughing" is almost unbelievable. I read on, sure in my mind it is inept, but hoping against myself that it is purposeful. I would rather a writer succeeded than failed.



It is inept. Mark Morris has a rather vague grasp of the use of metaphor and simile. Opening the book at random, I find, "like the ghostly chirruping of a trapped bird." Never mind what it is being compared to; the internal sense of the simile is strained. What is "ghostly" about the "chirruping of a trapped bird"? The further I got into this book the more I wished the author had sought out every occurrence of the word "like" and deleted the entire simile.

However, this cannot detract from the real achievement here. Toady learns a lesson and pays immediately with his life. The world in the book can only stare in horror. This means that the only other people who can benefit, who can learn, from his sacrifice are the readers. Thus this book could provide a useful map of real life, albeit the illustrations are rather gruesome.

**M**orrigan Books seem to be trustworthy cartographers within my metaphor, so I was intrigued to receive two very different books from them. *Alligator Alley* (Morrigan, £13.95) is presented as by "Mink Mole and Dr Adder." Mink Mole is a psychopath and a genetically engineered cocktail of mink, mole and human. The story is told in his first-person narration. As such the first part is a staggering achievement of imagination. Mink Mole is on holiday (?) in Florida. Experiencing the breakdown of reality which is the central event of this marvellous science-fiction novel through the distorted perception of this psychopathic meta-human is disorienting in the extreme. Nevertheless, it works. I hated almost every minute of this simply because a lot of it was so callously nasty. But it was all perfectly in character.

When the other author, Dr Adder, comes on the scene, things start to shift into recognizable sf mode. K.W. Jeter once wrote a novel called *Dr Adder*. Either *Alligator Alley* is written by Jeter, or it is a skilful parody. The plot structure – hero has surreal adventures, encounters Dr Adder who explains what has been happening, then stands by while Adder wins battle with enemy in artificial context – is too similar for coincidence. Beyond plot, a far more subtle indicator is the idiosyncratic depiction of good and evil.

Whoever wrote it, it is significant that the central character of *Dr Adder* is an sf fan, and describes the concept of "info-dump" – *The incompetent writer's way of revealing the details of his story's setting, or whatever axe that particular author had to grind. In reality, it never takes place...there are no revealing conversations. At the point at which Dr Adder enters Alligator Alley, the surreal carnage ceases, and*

the explanatory conversations with Mink Mole begin. The term "info-dump" is bandied about, but never explained. Without it, it would have been impossible to bring the book to a meaningful conclusion through the first-person narrative of Mink Mole, as Mole doesn't understand what's happening.

So, is reality really an endless succession of incomprehensible death, as Mink Mole's map suggests? Or is it more of an intellectual endeavour, comprehensible to and controllable only by geniuses like Dr Adder? I can't answer that. I only know that, while apparently 100% genuine, this novel simply doesn't refer to my reality. I don't claim that its reality doesn't exist; just that it has never impinged on my consciousness. A bloody good book, though.

Onto more familiar ground with the second Morrigan book, I recognized almost every nook and cranny of the England which Keith Roberts depicts in this latest collection of stories, *Winterwood and Other Hauntings* (£13.95). Even the dust-jacket is comforting – a photograph of a Covent Garden pub I used to frequent. But comfort is hardly ever present in the stories. Rather, everything appears to be fireside cosy, and then Roberts opens a door and lets in a cold draught.

The maps here are not of England, they are of the mind and the soul. From the title, you would expect a book of ghost stories. But it is one of the great strengths of this most English of writers that he never supplies the expected. This is not to say that there are no ghosts in this book – there are: it's just that the stories aren't about them. As is usual with Roberts, the stories are about character. Thus, whether it is the killer car in "The Scarlet Lady," the threatening oak tree in "Everything in the Garden" or the alluring portrait of an 18th-century woman in "Mrs Cibber," each haunting is as easily read as a projection of the character's obsession as it is as a straight ghost story.

Other stories here fit less easily into this character/ghost balance. There is an unclassifiable story of a telepathic/telekinetic schoolgirl, an account of limbo (or is it hell) as a cocktail party, and a wonderful story of adolescent love reminiscent of L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*. But this is not one of Roberts's collections of linked stories, so if some of them seem ill-fitting under the title, then perhaps it is the title which is to blame. Read and enjoy them, if only because they are shivery and magical maps of a part of your mind you might not even have ventured into yet.

**"U**seful maps with a sense of their own intrinsic beauty" is not a fanciful way to describe the four stories

in John Crowley's book, *Novelty* (Doubleday, \$18.95). Of the four stories here, one, "Novelty," has already appeared in *Interzone*. A delightful meditation on the problems of writing, and not science-fictional or fantastic at all, it is perhaps a trifle too specialized for general taste. On the other hand, for anyone who ever wondered where writers get their crazy ideas, this is the best answer I know of.

"The Nightingale Sings At Night" is a modern fairy story, a touring map of the genesis of humanity, and of the inhumanity of gods. I can't tell you much without telling the whole story, so imagine the tale of Adam and Eve with God's faults and mistakes left in.

The other two stories are both science fiction, in that they invent a new science and then investigate its effects on real people. "In Blue" is set in a Communist future which results from the invention of Act-field theory. Hare, the central character, is a misfit. Once a child genius who might have further developed the theory, he never fulfils his potential. Rather, he becomes more and more discontent. This is the story of his fall from grace (although it isn't really, and cannot be according to the rules of his society) and his gradual discovery of what it is he wants. It must surely be a very familiar map to all of us. Beautifully drawn by Crowley, I don't pretend to understand all the ramifications yet. I just know that because it is so well done I will enjoy re-reading it on many occasions.

By far the longest story in the book, "Great Work of Time" is also the best. Time-paradox stories have been done to death, and I never wanted to see another. Thus, when the first chapter opens with a time traveller going back in time to make himself wealthy, I groan. But the second chapter makes me much more uneasy. The British Empire? The Cape-to-Cairo railway line? Wasn't that only Rhodes' dream? I don't know of any Bulawayo railway bridge. But then, my history has always been a bit shaky.

I determine to look it up later, and read on. Needless to say, Crowley does such a number on the time-paradox story that I suddenly realize I am in the presence of a piece likely to become as much a benchmark as "By His Bootstraps" was 50 years before. I will tell no more of the plot except that the pseudo-scientific premise of the entire story is "Orthogonal Logic," and that it is one of the most coherent pieces of pseudo-science I have ever read.

This story was apparently mooted to appear in *Interzone* but couldn't be fitted in before the publication of this volume. This is a shame for all you British readers, because I have no idea when it will be published here. Bother your bookshop, harass the publisher, because this is one of those few truly necessary sf stories. I don't know if we



will ever encounter the world Crowley describes, but if we do, I'll be ready with my map, and I will never be lost. Shouldn't you be ready too?

(Paul Brazier)

## Pointless Quests

I seem to be the only person in the universe who has never – watch my lips – never before read a Michael Moorcock book of any description, and I am mildly fazed by the knowledge that there are hordes of Moorcockians poised to summon avenging demons if I dare not to like it. I came to **The Fortress of the Pearl** (Gollancz, £11.95) therefore with a refreshing (or, depending on your viewpoint, I suppose infuriating) ignorance as to what, exactly, I am intended to infer from the subtitle "An Elric Novel." Should I have known why Elric is questing about the universe instead of getting on with the job of being emperor? The bit where we learn he's left his kingdom to the rule of an evil relative and is spending his time fantasizing about the evil relative doing evil things to his "beloved" betrothed, when there seems to be no reason why he shouldn't get on with the task of being a good ruler and husband himself, lost him my sympathy. The story itself was heavily signalled in places and all the characters sounded to me (Alnac Kreb, Oled Alesham, Raik Na Seem) like anagrams, but at the end of it I felt rather like Elric after his first draft of the mysterious elixir which seems to support life whilst actually diminishing it...I enjoyed the book, but I wouldn't want to read another: one more sip and I might find myself hooked.

Chris Dixon's **Winter in Aphelion** (Unwin, £6.99) has a much less macho hero in "Skarry the Dreamer." It's a nice enough read, an amble through a prehistory-type landscape with a likeable if vacuous hero and his various companions, including the blind daughter of the emperor. Watch out for one of the worst *deus ex machina* scenes ever perpetrated – oh, hi, we left you half a planet ago and without having heard a word from you since we just managed to break down this door in the heart of enemy territory in time to rescue you as you make your escape on the other side of it, and do you mind if we die now as we're obviously not going to be needed for the rest of the book?

Unfortunately this kind of dialogue is actually used for real in **Slaves of the Volcano God** by Craig Shaw Gardner (Headline, £2.99), in which a public relations man in a tracksuit navigates the worlds of the "cineverse," largely those of the worst kind of B-Western, in search of the lucious and kidnapped Dolores. Arthur Dent he

ain't. Which wouldn't be a problem if you didn't know Gardner hopes you think he is.

And then there is **Triumph of the Darksword**, the third in Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's Darksword Trilogy (Bantam, £3.50). Odd how good *Forging the Darksword* was and what a piece of (expletive deleted) this is. Nice pictures at the head of each chapter, but I resent ploughing through the whole thousand-page three-volume epic and still not finding out who Simkin really is.

Ian Williams' **The Lies that Bind** (Macdonald Childrens Books, £2.50) is a mildly interesting paranormal-talented-kids'-school-run-by-sinister-government-thugs story which shows promise but is marred by a slightly uncertain pitch that seems to come from the "Frontlines" brand image that Macdonald are trying to impose. One imagines the editor chewing his cigar and asking for another page of social awareness and a couple of paragraphs of ecology. Oh, and a couple of four-letter words, please, Ian.

**The Island** by T.M. Wright (Gollancz, £3.50) is intended as horror: drowned people return from a frozen lake...they just don't seem to do anything much when they come back and neither the horror nor the frozen lake chilled me at all. The chopped-up style with frequent flashbacks confused rather than enhanced the plot and the character with broken English moved rapidly from twee through irritating to downright aggravating.

**Earthbound** by Richard Matheson (Robinson, £10.95) is one for the boys – sexist crap about a middle aged writer being hotly pursued by the unquiet spirit of "beautiful, unearthly Marianna, waiting for a companion to lure into her nightmare of lust." All middle-aged male writers are strangely irresistible and all women are dried up spinsters, dowdy wives or sex-crazed animals. Yawn.

And finally there are two books actually worth reading: Rosaleen Love's **The Total Devotion Machine and Other Stories** (Women's Press, £4.50) is a collection of snappy Australian short stories, mainly of the "bad girls metamorphize" school. Good to see Women's Press emerging from its fallow patch. **Starson** by Dan Parkinson (Penguin, £3.50) is another "Elves in America" story in which five "Cai" – a race of elves who once lived on Earth and abandoned it in the Cretaceous era – sing their way back to look for a "bane" for the "Corad" that threatens their new home. There's some fairly soppy language and another strongly-signalled ending, but there's also a nicely-told "oh, wow, there's an alien living in my head" sub-plot – and at least, thank goodness, it's a genuine page-turner.

(Wendy Bradley)

## Fantasy, Etc.

I had been looking forward to **Keeper of the Keys** by Janny Wurtz (Grafton, £12.95), having particularly enjoyed *Stormwarden*. Jaric is coming to terms with being heir to the Firelord. His dilemma is to keep safe the keys which bind the Mharg-demons without using the power which destroyed his father. As he tries to find an alternative he is pursued across the oceans by demons who want to gain the keys and destroy him. The book lacks some of the vigour of its predecessor and the more complex characters are off-stage for most of the time. However Jaric's problem and his search are well developed and the final flight in a small boat creates a sense of claustrophobia, even in the wide expanses of the seas, as the demons get ever closer.

**The Usurper** by Angus Wells (Sphere, £3.99) is also a sequel. In the *Wrath of Ashar* the invading hoards of the god Ashar were defeated, but now his servant Taws finds a way to infiltrate the Kingdoms and strike at the throne itself. Kedryn, the Chosen One, is too involved with regaining his sight to find out what is happening until it is too late. Well written, but it left me feeling rather cheated as the climax is over too fast for the lengthy build-up.

**New Moon** by Midori Snyder (Unwin, £3.50) is a much better book than its packaging makes it appear. It is set in a strange land ruled over by an immortal Queen where children with psychic powers are identified and killed when they reach adulthood. There is a castle, with complex Byzantine politics, and a city with packs of beggar children. These children are at risk not only from the Queen but from a stranger who is sucking both power and life out of them. An enjoyable book where the author has created a sinister situation which echoes both Mervyn Peake and Charles Dickens.

**Heir of Rengarth** by Carole Nelson Douglas (Corgi, £3.50) continues *Keepers of Edenvant* and its predecessors. Irissa and Kendric pursue their enemy Geronfry into yet another world, but as before the worlds are confused and the characters slight. I was surprised to find myself enjoying **The Luck of Relian Kru** by Paula Volsky (Legend, £3.50). At first the slight characters and one-dimensional world appeared unattractive. However Relian's bizarre situation, caught between a gargantuan sorcerer and a cadaverous executioner, became compelling. Relian's luck is known to be non-existent, but he must develop supranormal powers, serve the sorcerer, evade the executioner, keep happy the robot-snake set round his neck and rescue his lady-love. Any lack of credibility soon became irrelevant.

I'm not sure whether **The Outlaws of Sherwood** by Robin McKinley (Mac-



donald, £11.95) is meant to be for adults or teenagers. At first it's a rather brisk retelling of the legend. However once Robin is settled in Sherwood and both Little John and Friar Tuck have been introduced the story relaxes. I could quibble that Marion would never have had so much freedom to wander around – some of the “modern” elements do sit uneasily with the traditional ones – but in the end they are effective in telling the story from an unusual point of view. Here is a Robin who is pushed into becoming a popular leader by others, and it is a nice touch that everyone in his band should be a better archer than him. I particularly liked the sense of their vulnerability in Sherwood Forest – it can only a matter of time before they will be found.

**The Chestnut Soldier** by Jenny Nimmo (Methuen, £7.95) is definitely for young people. Gwyn is a teenager, but he is also a wizard at a loss as to how to protect his friends from the peril which their cousin brings. A well-written book where the magic and danger are interspersed with the normal human dilemmas which the young people face: Gwyn's resentment of his grandmother; Nia's jealousy; Catrin's exhilaration at the attentions of two young men. The resolution is for the natural as well as for the supernatural world.

Although **The Unicorn Alphabet** by Marianna Mayer and Michael Hague (Frances Lincoln, £7.95) is delightful I find it difficult to see who will buy it. It is a picture book with illustrations of great charm and strength (although the unicorn in “M” – for mistletoe – looks rather like an emaciated greyhound). The text is a treatise on mediæval herb lore and symbolism, and both text and picture are set in an Art Nouveau border of the relevant plant. Despite the visual quality of the book I suspect that children will find the text boring and adults will find it too slight.

**The Great Deeds of Superheroes** by Maurice Saxby and Maurice Ingpen (Paper Tiger, £12.95) is obviously aimed at the Christmas market. It will be welcomed by adults who do not know much about children's literature or tastes but must find a present to give. These superheroes are the stuff of legends rather than comic books: Perseus, Gilgamesh, Samson, Beowulf. The range is very wide and if Saxby's text is sometimes a little heavy it is faithful to his research. The illustrations are superbly suited to the epic quality of the subjects.

(Phyllis McDonald)

## Anthologies

From the title, it's easy to guess that the theme of **Arrows of Eros** (NEL, £3.50), a collection of original sf and fantasy stories edited by Alex Stewart,

is sex. The come-hither cover and nudge-nudge sleeve notes make you brace yourself for the worst, but fortunately the writers take an intelligent approach to their subject.

“Wildland,” by the ubiquitous Brian Stableford, is set in the far future, amid an alien Earth jungle, and describes two men's encounter with a vegetable simulation of womanhood. Stableford evokes a world of strangeness and dark, disturbing eroticism in what is perhaps the most powerful story here.

Tanith Lee invites us to guess the precise services offered by a special sort of android (whose bite is better – and worse – than the real thing) in “The Beautiful Biting Machine.” Diana Wynne Jones' unfetchingly titled “Mela Worms” turns out to be a pacy and amusing space opera, wherein almost everything that moves aboard a tramp spaceship ends up sexually embroiled with everything else.

Two writers have opted for sequels to their previous work. Gary Kilworth follows the adventurous prose of “Hogfoot Right and Birdhands” (*Other Edens* I) with “The Amorous Adventures of Hogfoot Right”. Unfortunately, if you've read the first (excellent) story then the intriguing idea of severed anatomical parts enjoying a life of their own becomes a little tired. Kim Newman follows “Patricia's Profession” (*Interzone* 14, and also excellent) with “Patricia's Pursuit,” set in a future where people kill each other for fun and make it up to each other in bed afterwards. It's readable, but again more of a retreat than a development.

Of the more opaque, introspective stories in the collection, Simon Ounsley's “The Growing Place” is by far the most successful. Although teetering on the brink of obscurity in places, it pulls through with a brooding sense of atmosphere in a world where the structures of sex and conception are very different to our own. There are some other relatively new writers here. The plot of Anne Gay's “Howie Dreams” is not quite credible, but both the characterization and cyberpunk-style writing promise stronger stories to come. Christina Lake's “The Cat and the Sleep Compiler” is a lightweight but entertaining variation on the trapped-in-a-dream story.

However, the anthology features sixteen stories in total – and several are much less satisfactory. For example, in “Cruel as the Grave,” editor Alex Stewart gives us a mix of jealousy and time travel which, beneath the glossy prose, doesn't add up to anything. And perhaps most disappointing of all, because we expect so much better, is Iain Banks' “Odd Attachment,” a weak joke masquerading as a short story. On a more positive note, there's Stephen Gallagher. “The Horn” once again shows what a very fine horror writer

this man is. The plot of the story – a traveller's experiences on a snow-bound motorway – may seem routine, but Gallagher's writing transforms this mundane material into a convincing nightmare.

There have been other anthologies on the theme of sex before (even two issues of *Interzone* devoted to the subject) and clearly *Arrows of Eros* invites comparison with these. Only a handful of stories, the Stableford most prominent among them, have anything really new to contribute and several are linked so tangentially with the theme that they could easily have been slotted into just about any other anthology in the sf/fantasy/horror mould without arousing comment. Still, considering *Arrows* simply as one such collection, there are enough strong to readable stories here – with enough variety amongst them – to make it worth trying.

**Other Edens III** (Unwin, £4.50) is the latest in the series of anthologies co-edited by Christopher Evans and Robert Holdstock, and once again it features mainly British authors, some well-known, some just starting out. Perhaps it's no surprise then that the bulk of the stories are almost archetypally “British,” with such familiar elements as witchcraft, ritual sacrifice and post-breakdown society pervading the collection.

The prevailing mood is established in the opening story, Keith Roberts' “The Grey Wethers,” a contemporary tale of a young girl entwined with the pagan past while increasingly at odds with her own society. Considering Roberts' track record, it's difficult to understand what's gone wrong here, but it's hard reading and fails to satisfy.

Out of a total of sixteen stories, there are none that are really outstanding, although there are some reasonable reads. By and large, the stories that work best are those which steer away from the rather claustrophobic climate that the anthology as a whole presents. Perhaps the most notable is “Rainmaker Cometh,” in which Ian McDonald crosses a Laffertyesque plotline with Bradbury's American Midwest dreamscape. The Rainmaker of the title, a fantastical flying city, approaches a dust-dry American town that is full of futile hopes and wasted lives. McDonald writes with an energy and a luminous prose style that, quite simply, make his stories stand out.

In “A Tupolev Too Far,” Brian Aldiss takes the unashamedly unlikely premise of a jet-setting businessman unwittingly shifted from his own timeline where the Tsars still rule, into the Brezhnev Russia of our own. Although the story tails off disappointingly at the end, up to that point it pulls the reader along with an ease which reminds us what an accomplished writer Aldiss can be. Usually, Christopher



Evans' own stories can be relied on as high points in any anthology and the "The Wailing Woman," another instalment in his "Chimera" series, does have enough strong points to make it a worthwhile read. However, the story lacks the impact of the earlier stories ("The Bridge," Zenith, and "Artefacts," IZ 23) and, overall, there is the feel here of an idea that is being simply extended, rather than developed.

Two *Interzone* regulars are represented here. Eric Brown's "The Disciples of Apollo" explores the same emotional territory as "The Time-Lapsed Man" (IZ 24) – a doomed man struggling to come to terms with fate – and although it doesn't equal that earlier story it's a success judged on its own terms. And there's S. M. Baxter, who has (wisely, in principle) opted to set his story, "The Droplet," outside his usual space adventure format. He dumps the spaceships and aliens, doubles up on the hard science and mixes in some unconvincing domestic strife. Among particle physicists it might have all the dramatic grip of a Raymond Chandler novel, but unfortunately the layperson will be less enthralled. Better will doubtless follow.

Among the newer writers, Simon D. Ings makes a promising debut with "Blessed Fields," a tale of adolescence and dark ritual, and J. D. Gresham's "The New Mapper" is an effective eco-warning parable. Of the several spells and sorcery stories in the book, the wit and intricacy of Sherry Coldsmith's gourmet horror, "The Way to his Heart," make it distinctive enough to be the best of an otherwise homogeneous bunch. Also worth a mention is Chris Morgan's "Losing Control", a straightforward story of a group of human castaways (and, in particular, their unsavoury leader) losing control in an alien environment. Perhaps, in the company of so many stories that seem unnecessarily over-wrought, it's this relative simplicity that makes it work. Overall though, *Other Edens III* is a disappointing collection. It succeeds marginally better than its immediate predecessor, but the excellent, varied stories in *Other Edens I* set a standard which all too many anthologies – this one included – simply haven't been able to match. Let's hope the next volume does better.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

## Just One Good Woman

Stephen King is, at his best, a storyteller of extraordinary vigour and narrative drive. In *The Dark Half* (Hodder & Stoughton, £12.95) he seeks to explore the nature of the creative impulse through the metaphor of twin

brothers, one good, one evil, both writers. Thaddeus Beaumont has earned critical acclaim, but neither fame and fortune nor personal happiness, with his first two novels. Then writer's block intervenes, until he creates a series of violent thrillers under the pseudonym George Stark. Stark/Beaumont's anti-hero, Alexis Machine, who specializes in disposing of his enemies with a straight razor, enjoys cult success. Thad, rich and seemingly happy, fathers twins and plans to write the great American novel. The trouble starts when, determined to kill off his alter ego, he poses for a magazine photofeature beside Stark's faked tombstone. Stark literally emerges from the grave in a bid to revenge himself, with a straight razor, on everyone involved in the feature, and to induce Thad to resume writing under his pseudonym. The struggle between Thad, who refuses to co-exist with his "dark half," and Stark, who cannot survive without Thad's cooperation, is the theme of the novel.

Promising though all this sounds, *The Dark Half* is not one of Stephen King's most powerful stories. He is hampered both by his twins metaphor and by the requirements of the horror genre to thrill and terrify. King, of course, also wrote under the name Richard Bachman, and he clearly relishes teasing the reader, acknowledging his indebtedness to "the late Richard Bachman" but claiming too that a novelist is just "a fellow [sic] who [gets] paid to tell lies." His mistake lies in taking his metaphor too literally. He produces familiar evidence of the physical and psychic links between twins, but fumbles the key question: can twins be described as one personality inhabiting two bodies? Stark is Thad's black sheep brother, and he remains, obstinately, just that. Thad's personal darkness lies in the realms of depression and alcoholism, not a murderous psychosis. In any case, surely it is the character Alexis Machine who has come to life, not George Stark, novelist? True, there would be little mileage in a dark half who spent his time tapping away at a keyboard.

Nor does Thad put in many hours at his desk. When not battling Stark he changes nappies and warms bottles for infant offspring Will and Wendy – a hint, perhaps, that a full humanity requires the nurturing of the female and the male in all of us. Don't run away with the idea that King has converted to feminism, though. There is only ever room for one "good" woman in a Stephen King novel: here she appears as "Liz," Thad's wife. Unthreatening, chastely devoted to her husband, Liz keeps house, tends her children, asks dumb questions, and still looks good in blue nylon nighties. The other female characters are, as

usual, whores and bitches. The real romantic interest is provided by Sheriff Alan Pangborn, as he and Thad journey together from hostility and suspicion to mutual admiration.

In *The Dark Half* King's energy has, by his prodigious standards, flagged. The familiar use of naive spectators to progress the plot, provide local colour and vary the viewpoint, threatens to degenerate here into straightforward verbosity. Sex is perfunctory – "[he] was aware...that this was quite a lot of woman" – and there are relatively few genuinely spine-tingling or suspenseful moments. While there is electricity here sufficient for two or three lower-voltage writers, from Stephen King this is a disappointing offering.

(Chris Hampshire)

## Radically Different

**S**ongs Of A Dead Dreamer by Thomas Ligotti (Robinson, £5.99). Horror, or "dark fantasy" as the book jacket prefers it, is a difficult thing to review in an sf magazine. Readers of science fiction do not often find its kindred genre much to their taste, and with reason: because a lot, perhaps the majority, of the stuff marketed as "horror" is really just a sort of sadistic pornography, depending almost solely on provoking disgust. To retain its impact, it has to be made continually more vicious, and soon becomes either a bore, or a laugh. A good horror story, on the other hand, will aim for something conceptually deeper, and if done well will rely more on grotesquerie and suggestion than on simple shock.

Horror is radically different from sf, but it is not impossible to appreciate both genres. The main differences are that horror presupposes an actively malicious Universe, instead of an indifferent one; and that it usually has a semi-supernatural, rather than a naturalistic, rationale. The "dark fantasy" label (like the old "weird fiction" one) is, therefore, perhaps a truer description than the modern term.

So if you are an sf reader, this book may not be to your taste – but I, at any rate, think it very good. Needless to say, it contains very little of the overt hyper-violence I panned above. Ligotti concentrates on stories of existential crisis: and the horror is not so often that of being destroyed, as that of losing one's identity and being, in a Universe in the charge of an infantile and vile chaos. The stories have the genuine feeling of nightmare, only marred, I think, by a certain petulance and self-indulgence in the narrative: and they really are wonderfully original and imaginative. I judge this point not only by the yardstick of other horror stories, but by the wider standards of sf and fantasy generally. (AR)



# UK Books Received

## October-November 1989

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the period specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Ackroyd, Peter. **First Light**. Sphere/Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10157-4, 328pp, paperback, £3.99. (Borderline sf/fantasy novel about the mysteries of time, first published in 1989; this would appear to be the "export" paperback edition, sent to us well in advance of UK release.) 5th April 1990.

Alderman, Gill. **The Archivist**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440399-2, 380pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer, it comes with cover commendations by M. John Harrison and Ian Watson.) 26th October.

Aldiss, Brian. **Forgotten Life**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0123-6, 398pp, paperback, £3.99. (Non-sf novel by a prominent sf author; first published in 1988; recommended.) 7th December.

Allen, Roger MacBride. **Farside Cannon**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4305-0, 406pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 12th October.

Anderson, Poul and Karen. **The King of Ys 4: The Dog and the Wolf**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07344-2, 541pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 7th December.

Anthony, Piers. **Battle Circle: A Trilogy**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13549-6, 537pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf omnibus, first published in the USA, 1978; it contains the novels *Sos the Rope* [1968], *Var the Stick* [1973] and *Neq the Sword* [1975]; this is the third Corgi imprint of the combined book.) 10th November.

Anthony, Piers. **For Love of Evil. Book Six: Incarnations of Immortality**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20682-5, 381pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 12th October.

Anthony, Piers. **Of Man and Manta: A Trilogy**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13548-8, 622pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf omnibus, first published in 1986; it contains the novels *Omni-vore* [1968], *Orn* [1970] and *Ox* [1976], which are regarded by some as being among Anthony's best works.) 10th November.

Anthony, Piers. **Tarot**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20618-3, 616pp, paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; it contains a revised text of the trilogy *God of Tarot* [1979], *Vision of Tarot* [1980] and *Faith of Tarot* [1980], which Anthony says was never intended by him to be split into separate books.) 9th November.

Asimov, Isaac. **Azazel**. Doubleday/Foundation, ISBN 0-385-26917-X, 221pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1988; the ISBN inside the book does not tally with the one given on the dustjacket; this appears to be the third printing of the original American book with a UK cover wrapped round it.) 9th November.

Asimov, Isaac. **Prelude to Foundation**. "The magnificent overture to his classic *Foundation* saga." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07111-3, 460pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 26th October.

Attanasio, A. A. **In Other Worlds**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20543-8, 222pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 12th October.

Awlinson, Richard. **Shadowdale**. "Forgotten Realms. The Avatar Trilogy: Book One." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012628-7, 335pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 26th October.

Awlinson, Richard. **Tantras**. "Forgotten Realms. The Avatar Trilogy: Book Two." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012629-5, 338pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 23rd November.

Bailey, K. V. **The Sky Giants**. Triffid Books [Val de Mer, Alderney, Channel Islands], ISBN 0-9510574-3-X, 24pp, paperback, £1.50. (Sf/fantasy verse sequence, first edition.) November.

Bayley, Barrington J. **The Fall of Chronopolis and Collision with Chronos**. "Two sf classics in one powerful volume." Pan, ISBN 0-330-30834-3, 399pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf omnibus; the two novels were first published in the USA, the former in 1974 and the latter [as *Collision Course*] in 1973; Bayley is of course a British writer, and an underappreciated one.) 10th December.

Bayley, Barrington J. **The Pillars of Eternity and The Garments of Caean**. "Two sf classics in one powerful volume." Pan, ISBN 0-330-30835-1, 414pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf omnibus; the two novels were first published in the USA, the former in 1982 and the latter [in abridged form] in 1976.) 10th December.

Bear, Greg. **Tangents**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04141-2, 290pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1989.) 19th October.

Bester, Alfred. **Extro**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0127-9, 218pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *The Computer Connection*, 1975; this was the late, great Bester's "comeback" book after a long period away from the sf field.) 7th December.

Bester, Alfred. **Golem 100**. Illustrated by Jack Gaughan. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0126-0, 383pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1980; a mish-mash of typographic tricks and weird illustrative matter, it's regarded by some as Bester's most "problematical" book.) 7th December.

Bova, Ben. **Peacekeepers**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0120-1, 337pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 2nd November.

Brooks, Terry. **Wizard at Large**. "A Magic Kingdom of Landover novel." Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8311-7, 291pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 7th December.

Brosnan, John. **War of the Sky Lords**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04380-6, 252pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *The Sky Lords*.) 26th October.

Burroughs, William S. **Interzone**. Edited by James Grauerholz. Pan/Picador, ISBN 0-330-31072-0, 194pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Non-sf collection, first published in the USA, 1989; this was announced as a "novel" several years ago; it turns out to be a collection of pieces from the 1950s, including "Word," a longish chunk of what was then Burroughs's work-in-progress, *Interzone* - the completed book, minus this bit, was retitled *The Naked Lunch* [1959], and the rest is history.) October.

Buxton, James. **Subterranean**. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4358-1, 288pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first edition.) 9th November.

Card, Orson Scott. **Prentice Alvin**. "The Tales of Alvin Maker 3." Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2953-X, 342pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Alternative-world fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 14th December.

Card, Orson Scott. **Red Prophet: The Tales of Alvin Maker II**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-960940-1, 396pp, paperback, £3.99. (Alternative-world fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 7th December.

Carver, Jeffrey A. **From a Changeling Star**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-40023-1, 355pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this is in fact the US edition with a British ISBN and price labelled onto the back.) December?

Cherryh, C. J. **Brothers of Earth**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0128-7, 282pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1976.) 7th December.

Cherryh, C. J. **Cuckoo's Egg**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0116-3, 319pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; second Methuen/Mandarin printing.) 2nd November.

Cherryh, C. J. **Cyteen**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-50086-1, 680pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; the most recent Hugo Award winner; a mammoth book, almost 700 pages of small print.) 2nd November.

\*Cherryh, C. J. **The Paladin**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0243-7, 383pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 11th January.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **Rama II**. "The astonishing sequel to *Rendezvous with Rama*." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04545-0, 377pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; it contains an afterword by Clarke in which he explains why he took on a collaborator, and then announces two more forthcoming sequels: *The Garden of Rama* and *Rama Revealed*.) 2nd November.

Clarke, Arthur C. **Reach for Tomorrow**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04609-0, 166pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1956.) 7th December.

Clarke, Arthur C. **Tales from Planet Earth**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3480-0, 313pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf collection, first edition [?]; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; contains 16 stories, most of them familiar, ranging from "The Road to the Sea" [1950] to "On Golden Seas" [1987].) 18th January.

Coontz, Otto. **Through the Nightsea Wall**. Methuen, ISBN 0-416-13542-0, 225pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; first volume in "The Ausable Odysseys" series.) 30th October.

Craig, Brian. **Zaragoz**. Illustrated by Ian Miller, Martin McKenna and others. "Warhammer." G. W. Books, ISBN 1-85515-003-4, 245pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; "Brian Craig" is a pseudonym of Brian Stableford.) November.

David, Peter. **The Return of Swamp Thing**. Based on a screenplay by Derek Spencer and Grant Morris. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13581-X, 239pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novelization of the movie based on the D.C. Comics creation; first published in the USA, 1989.) December?

Dever, Joe. **California Countdown: Free-way Warrior 4**. Illustrated by Brian Williams. Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-957730-5, 350pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf gamebook, first edition.) 2nd November.



Dick, Philip K. **The Father-Thing: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Three.** Introduction by John Brunner. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04616-3, 376pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987; consists of 23 stories, all written in 1953-54.) 16th November.

Dickson, Gordon R. **The Earth Lords.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0242-6, 311pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 7th December.

Dillard, J. M. **Star Trek V: The Final Frontier.** Based on the screenplay by David Loughery. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20894-1, 311pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novelization, first published in the USA, 1989.) 12th October.

Droid, Ann. **The Intergalactic Joke Book.** Illustrated by Jeremy Tapscott. Hodder/Knight, ISBN 0-340-51105-2, 92pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile humour on sf themes, first edition.) 7th December.

Eco, Umberto. **Foucault's Pendulum.** Translated from the Italian by William Weaver. Secker & Warburg, ISBN 0-436-14096-9, 641pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Literary mystery novel with occult elements, first published in Italy, 1988.) 16th October.

Eddings, David. **Demon Lord of Karanda: Book Three of The Malloreon.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13019-2, 399pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; although this is officially the first UK mass-market release, it's already the seventh printing from Transworld Publishers; Eddings is a big seller.) 1st December.

Eddings, David. **Sorcerer of Darshiva.** "Book Four of The Malloreon." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01204-6, 381pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 9th November.

Engh, M. J. **Wheel of the Winds.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20614-0, 352pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; the second novel [after a 12-year gap] by the talented author of *A Wind from Bukhara* [Arslan]; it appears to be a more conventional sf adventure than her debut book.) 9th November.

Farris, John. **Bad Blood.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04648-1, 350pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA as *All Heads Turn When the Hunt Goes By*, 1977; it has an entry in Jones & Newman's *Horror: 100 Best Books*.) 19th October.

Feist, Raymond E. **Prince of the Blood.** Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13077-6, 315pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to "The Riftwar Saga"; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 2nd November.

Forward, Robert. **The Owl.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51572-9, 247pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror/crime novel, first published in the USA, 1984; apparently this author is the son of Robert L. Forward, the well-known scientist and sf writer.) 7th December.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Flinx in Flux.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51571-0, 324pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; latest in the loosely knit "Humanx Commonwealth" series, which began with Foster's first published novel in 1972.) 7th December.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **Back to the Future Part II.** Based on a screenplay by Bob Gale. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3429-9, 216pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1989.) 9th November.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Disagreement With Death.** "Verse the Third in The Ballad of

Wuntvor." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3302-0, 185pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 2nd November.

Gemmell, David. **Knights of Dark Renown.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-963950-5, 400pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1989.) 16th November.

Gemmell, David A. **The Last Guardian.** "The fourth Sipstrassi Fantasy." Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2517-8, 279pp, trade paperback, £5.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 9th November.

Gerrold, David. **Chess With a Dragon.** "A Millennium Book." Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-960950-9, 127pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 2nd November.

Gibson, Edward. **Reach.** Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-18676-8, 328pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; the author is a former Skylab astronaut; proof copy received.) 7th December.

Goldstein, Lisa. **A Mask for the General.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-964880-6, 224pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 16th November.

Haldeman, Joe. **The Long Habit of Living.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-51071-9, 300pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Buying Time*, 1989; there is a simultaneous trade paperback [not seen].) 19th October.

Hardy, David A. **Visions of Space: Artists Journey Through the Cosmos.** Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-098-3, 176pp, hardcover, £16.95. (Large-format, lavishly illustrated art book, devoted to "realistic" space art over the decades; first edition; recommended.) 30th November.

Harrison, Harry. **Bill, the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Robot Slaves.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04615-5, 236pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 19th October.

Harrison, Harry. **Return to Eden: Book Three in the West of Eden Trilogy.** Illustrated by Bill Sanderson. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06481-8, 400pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1988.) 23rd November.

Harrison, M. John. **Climbers.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-03632-X, 221pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Non-sf novel by a well-known sf/fantasy writer; this is Harrison's long-promised realistic novel about the world of rock-climbing; characters, mood, landscapes and style are all much as his regular readers would expect; recommended.) Late entry: published in September, received by us in October.

Hockley, Chris. **Steel Ghost.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20593-4, 320pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel which appears to be about the return of Joseph Stalin; first edition; a debut novel by a new British author.) 9th November.

Hyde, Christopher. **Crestwood Heights.** Mandarin, ISBN 0-7472-3201-6, 504pp, paperback, £4.59. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1988.) 1st December.

Hyde, Christopher. **Egypt Green.** Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-69943-1, 274pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf/horror novel, described as a "techno-chiller;" first published in the USA [?], 1989.) 16th October.

Jakubowski, Maxim, ed. **New Crimes.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-037-8, 253pp, trade paperback, £5.99. (Crime-fiction

anthology, first edition; not really our province, but Jakubowski is well known as an editor of sf anthologies, and this first in a new annual series does contain a story by horror-fantast Stephen Gallagher; it also contains original work by the likes of Barry Fantoni, Peter Lovesey, Bill Pronzini and M. J. Trow, as well as reprinted pieces by John Le Carré and Cornell Woolrich and an interview with Patricia Highsmith.) 23rd November.

Jarvis, Robin. **The Crystal Prison: Book Two of The Deptford Mice.** Illustrated by the author. Macdonald/Purnell, ISBN 0-361-08575-3, 261pp, paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 19th October.

Jefferies, Mike. **Glitterspike Hall: Book One of The Heirs to Gnarlsmyre.** Illustrated by the author. Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617664-X, 413pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 12th October.

Jones, Diana Wynne. **Warlock at the Wheel and Other Stories.** Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-965090-8, 176pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile fantasy collection, first published in 1984.) 7th December.

[Jones, Stephen, ed.] **Fantasy Tales, Vol. 11, No. 3.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-039-4, 98pp, paperback, £0.99. (Book-format, twice-yearly fantasy magazine, listed here because it carries an ISBN rather than an ISSN; this is the third issue to be published by Robinson, and it contains new stories by Ramsey Campbell, David J. Schow, etc.) 30th November.

[Kane, Bob, et al.] **The Greatest Batman Stories Ever Told.** Introduction by Dick Giordano. "The definitive DC collection." Hamlyn, ISBN 0-600-56787-7, trade paperback, £7.99. (Comic-strip collection, first edition [?]; it includes all-colour material from 1939 onwards plus the 1987 graphic novel *Batman, Son of the Demon* by Mike W. Barr and Jerry Bingham.) 30th October.

Kilworth, Garry. **In the Hollow of the Deep-Sea Wave: A Novel and Seven Stories.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440530-8, 232pp, paperback, £3.99. (Non-sf collection, first published in 1989; by an author who has contributed frequently to *Interzone*; some of these stories verge on fantasy, and most have exotic, mainly Far-Eastern, settings.) 30th November.

King, Stephen. **The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0100-4, 249pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel [actually the opening episodes in a story cycle], first published in the USA, 1982.) 7th December.

Kirby, Josh. **The Josh Kirby Poster Book, As Inspired by Terry Pratchett's Discworld Novels.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-99382-4, 32pp, paperbound, £7.95. (Art portfolio, containing 13 large-format reproductions of Kirby book-cover illustrations; first edition.) 10th November.

Kirchoff, Mary. **Dragonlance Preludes, Volume Two: Kendermore.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012632-5, 346pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 7th December.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Face of Fear.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3296-2, 314pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA under the pseudonym "K. R. Dwyer," 1977.) 9th November.

Kurtz, Katherine. **Deryni Checkmate.** "Volume 2 of The Chronicles of the Deryni." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-961950-4, 302pp, paperback, £3.50. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1970.) 7th December.



Kurtz, Katherine. **The Harrowing of Gwynedd: Volume 1 of The Heirs of Saint Camber.** Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3500-9, 384pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 14th December.

Kurtz, Katherine. **The Legacy of Lehr.** "A Millennium Book." Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-960960-6, 205pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 2nd November.

Lackey, Mercedes. **Arrow's Fall.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-962560-1, 319pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Arrows of the Queen*, etc.) 16th November.

Lansdale, Joe R. **The Drive-In (A "B" Movie with Blood and Popcorn, Made in Texas).** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51570-2, 158pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 7th December.

Lee, Samantha. **Childe Rolande.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8323-0, 288pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition [?]; it's by an Irish writer who lives in Scotland and is known for her short stories and children's novels.) 9th November.

Le Guin, Ursula K. **The Wind's Twelve Quarters.** "VGSF Classics 37." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04607-4, 303pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1975; the last UK paperback edition [from Grafton] was split into two slim volumes; it's good to see this fine book restored to its proper shape.) 16th November.

Lumley, Brian. **Ship of Dreams.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3318-7, 243pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; sequel to *Hero of Dreams*.) 1st December.

Lupoff, Richard A. **Philip José Farmer's The Dungeon, Book 1: The Black Tower.** "A Byron Preiss Book." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40024-X, xii+353pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; first of a shared-"pocket-universe" series conceived by Farmer, packaged by Preiss and, in this case, written by Lupoff.) 1st December.

McAuley, Paul J. **Secret Harmonies.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04580-9, 333pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Of the Fall*, 1989; the second book by a popular *Interzone* author.) 2nd November.

McCammon, Robert R. **The Wolf's Hour.** Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13456-9, 475pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1989; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; this seems to be an attempt to do the ultimate werewolf novel.) 12th October.

McDevitt, Jack. **A Talent for War.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0333-3, 310pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; McDevitt's second novel, it comes with recommendations from Gregory Benford, Michael Bishop and others.) 5th October.

McGill, Gordon. **Stallion.** Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4334-4, 176pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 7th December.

Martin, George R. R., ed. **Aces High: Wild Cards, Volume Two.** Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-159-2, 390pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf shared-world anthology, described as "a mosaic novel"; contains stories by authors ranging from Pat Cadigan to Roger Zelazny.) 19th October.

Morris, Jean. **The Troy Game.** Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-962080-4, 144pp, paper-

back, £2.50. (Juvenile fantasy [?] novel, first published in 1987; described by the TLS as "an extremely subtle book," according to the cover matter.) 7th December.

Niven, Larry, with Paul Anderson and Dean Ing. **The Man-Kzin Wars.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4361-1, 289pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf shared-world anthology, first published in the USA, 1988; it actually contains very little Niven, the bulk of the book consisting of novellas by Anderson and Ing.) 9th November.

Norton, Andre, and others. **Tales of the Witch World II.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30809-2, 376pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1988; original fantasies set against Norton's background by Clare Bell, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Diana L. Paxson, Susan Schwartz and a host of lesser-known authors; there is no story by Norton herself, nor is she actually billed as editor.) 10th December.

Perry, Steve. **Matadora.** "Volume 2 of The Matador Trilogy." Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0349-X, 211pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 16th November.

Pike, Christopher. **Last Act.** Hodder/Lighting, ISBN 0-340-50183-9, 206pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 7th December.

Pohl, Frederik. **The Annals of the Heechee.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8317-6, 338pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; fourth in the *Gateway*/"Heechee" series.) 12th October.

Pratchett, Terry. **Guards! Guards!** "A Discworld novel." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04606-6, 288pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 9th November.

Pratchett, Terry. **The Unadulterated Cat: A Campaign for Real Cats.** Cartoons by Gray Jolliffe. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04628-7, 96pp, trade paperback, £3.99. (Humorous book about pussies, by the bestselling fantasy writer; first edition.) 12th October.

Pratchett, Terry. **Wyrd Sisters.** "A Discworld novel." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13460-0, 252pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1988; a pre-publication extract appeared in this magazine over a year ago; recommended, naturally; we are told that sales of the Discworld series in Corgi paperback now exceed 600,000.) 10th November.

Pringle, David, ed. **Ignorant Armies.** Illustrated by John Blanche, Jim Burns and others. "Warhammer." G. W. Books, ISBN 1-85515-002-6, 252pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; contains original stories by Steve Baxter, Brian Craig [Brian Stableford], Nicola Griffith, William King, Jack Yeovil [Kim Newman] and others.) October.

Pringle, David, ed. **Wolf Riders.** Illustrated by Paul Bonner, Dave Gallagher and others. "Warhammer." G. W. Books, ISBN 1-85515-004-2, 236pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; contains original stories by William King, Brian Craig [Brian Stableford], Jack Yeovil [Kim Newman], Pete Garratt, Simon Ounsley and others.) November.

Roberson, Jennifer. **A Pride of Princes: Chronicles of the Cheysuli, Book Five.** Corgi, 0-552-13122-9, 453pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 1st December.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **Run to the Stars.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8312-5, 245pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1982; a reissue of Rohan's entertaining first book.) 7th December.

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Third Book of Lost Swords: Stonecutter's Story.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4308-5, 247pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 12th October.

St. Clair, David. **Bloodline.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13323-X, 352pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) 1st December.

Sampson, Fay. **White Nun's Telling: Book Two in the sequence Daughter of Tintagel.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3297-0, 245pp, paperback, £3.50. (Historical novel, first edition; sequel to *Wise Woman's Telling*; yet another variation on the Arthurian themes.) 2nd November.

Saul, John. **Creature.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17680-3, 329pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 10th November.

Saunders, David. **Encyclopedia of the Worlds of Doctor Who, E-K.** Illustrated by Tony Clark. Hodder/Knight, ISBN 0-340-51106-0, 160pp, paperback, £3.50. (TV reference book, first published in 1989.) 7th December.

Shaw, Bob. **The Fugitive Worlds.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04611-2, 254pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *The Ragged Astronauts* and *The Wooden Spaceships*.) 19th October.

Shuler, Linda Lay. **She Who Remembers.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30889-0, 427pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Historical novel, first published in the USA, 1987; the opening volume in a trilogy called "The Time Circle"; it seems to be about an Amerindian woman who meets a Viking, circa 1270 AD, and Jean M. Auel is quoted on the cover as saying "Shuler has written the novel of America's prehistory.") 10th November.

Shupp, Mike. **With Fate Conspire: Book One of The Destiny Makers.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3341-1, 306pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 2nd November.

Silverberg, Robert. **The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04622-8, 284pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1984.) 16th November.

Silverberg, Robert. **The Queen of Springtime.** "Volume 2 of The New Springtime." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04586-8, 415pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1989.) 16th November.

Smith, Guy N. **The Camp.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0058-X, 288pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) 16th November.

Smith, Guy N. **The Festering.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-961080-9, 191pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) 7th December.

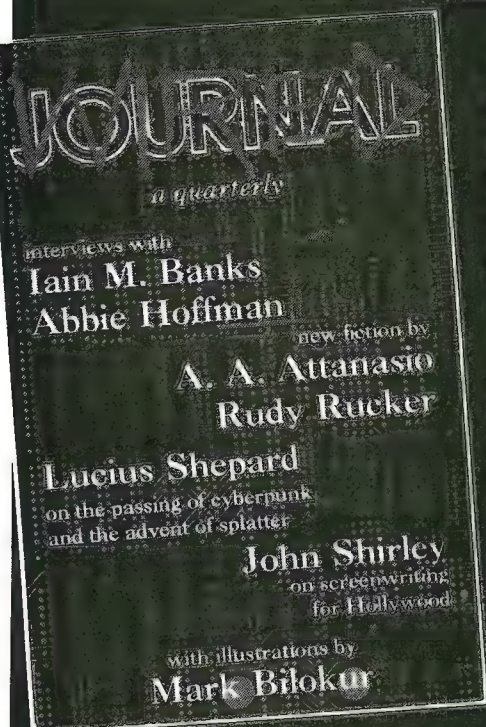
Smith, Guy N. **The Slime Beast.** "It gorged on human flesh..." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20496-2, 144pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1975.) 23rd November.

Stanton, Mary. **The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West.** Hodder, NEL, ISBN 0-450-50812-9, 346pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a horsey story which has gained some praise.) 2nd November.

Stanton, Mary. **Piper at the Gates of Dawn.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-50850-1, 308pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *Piper at the Gates*, 1989; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the title has been used before, by Richard Cowper among others, and it derives, of course,

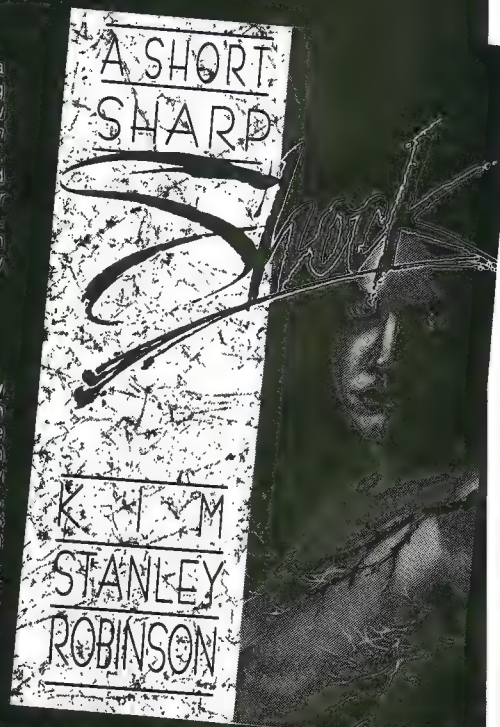


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from *The Wind in the Willows*; sequel to *The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West*.) 2nd November.

Steele, Allen. **Orbital Decay.** Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3776-1, 413pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received.) 22nd February.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil. **John Wyndham: Creator of the Cosy Catastrophe – A Working Bibliography.** 2nd edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 16." Galactic Central Publications [25a Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 0-871133-16-5, 10+39pp, paperback, £1.75. (Author bibliography; the first edition appeared in 1985.) Late entry: September publication, received in October.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Harry Maxwell Harrison: A Stainless Steel Talent – A Working Bibliography.** 4th edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 9." Galactic Central Publications [25a Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 0-871133-13-0, 10+70pp, paperback, £3. (Author bibliography; the first edition appeared in 1982.) Late entry: August publication, received in October.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **James White: Doctor to Aliens – A Working Bibliography.** 2nd edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 12." Galactic Central Publications [25a Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 0-871133-14-9, 10+23pp, paperback, £1.50. (Author bibliography; the first edition appeared in 1984.) Late entry: September publication, received in October.

Stewart, Alex, ed. **Arrows of Eros: Unearthly Tales of Love and Death.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-50249-X, 262pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; contains original stories on sexual themes by the usual British crew: Banks, Gallagher, Kilworth, Langford, Tanith Lee, Kim Newman, Stableford, etc., including one by the deputy editor of this magazine, Simon Ounsley, and one by Alex Stewart himself.) 2nd November.

Swigart, Rob. **Portal: A Dataspace Retrieval.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20649-3, 346pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; it's based on a computer game, but it has cover commendations from Richard A. Lupoff and Timothy Leary.) 7th December.

Taylor, Keith. **The First Longship: Bard II.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3317-9, 260pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 1st December.

Taylor, Roger. **The Waking of Orthlund: The Third Chronicle of Hawklan.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3340-3, 472pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 1st December.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Grass.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01783-8, 426pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; this book has been receiving much praise in America.) 12th October.

Tilley, Patrick. **The Amtrak Wars Book 5: Death-Bringer.** Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0001-6, 373pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 16th November.

Van Asten, Gail. **The Blind Knight.** Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617794-8, 218pp, paperback, £2.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a debut novel, it comes with some of the faintest praise we've ever seen on a paperback cover: "smooth . . . interesting . . . well-drawn.") 23rd November.

Voltaire. **Micromegas and Other Stories.** Translated by W. Fleming, with an introduction by Ben Barkow. "Dedalus European Classics." Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-55-3, xv+171pp, paperback, £4.95. (Collection of 18th-century contes philosophiques; the famous title story, about a giant Sirian who visits Earth, is only 30 pages long but there are three other tales in a similar fantastic vein.) 16th November.

Vonnegut, Kurt. **The Sirens of Titan.** "VGSF Classics 1." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04566-3, 224pp, paperback, £3.50. (Satirical sf novel, first published in the USA, 1959; this is a reissue in small format of the first of the "Classics" series, formerly published in 1986 as a "B" format paperback.) 7th December.

Weaver, Michael D. **Wolf-Dreams.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-49477-2, 686pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy/horror omnibus; contains the novels *Wolf-Dreams*, *Nightreaver* and *Bloodfang*, all first published in the USA, 1987-89.) 2nd November.

Webster, Lyn. **The Illumination of Alice J. Cunningham.** Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-39-1, 306pp, paperback, £5.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1987; it's "a remarkably accomplished first novel," according to the quotation from Brian Stableford on the cover.) 16th November.

Wells, H. G. **The Discovery of the Future, with The Common-Sense of World Peace and The Human Adventure.** Edited and introduced by Patrick Parrinder. PNL Press [Polytechnic of North London, Prince of Wales Rd., London NW5 3LB], ISBN 1-85377-0183, 60pp, paperback, £4.95 [inc. p&p, cheques payable to "H. G. Wells Society"]. (Essay collection by the greatest of sf writers; first edition; the three pieces were originally published variously in 1902, 1913 and 1929.) Late entry: September [?] publication, received in October.

White, James. **Code Blue – Emergency.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4364-6, 280pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; the latest in the "Sector General" series, which has been on the go for more than 25 years; some things never change.) 9th November.

Wilson, David Henry. **The Coachman Rat.** "A haunting allegory for the modern world." Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-002-5, 171pp, paperback, £4.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in West Germany, 1985; we are told nothing of the author, so it's hard to say whether this was originally written in German or in English; it appeared in a limited-edition UK hardcover in 1987, and it has received some praise.) Late entry: September [?] publication, received in October.

Wrede, Patricia C. **Caught in Crystal.** "A Lyra novel." Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8313-3, 293pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 7th December.

Wright, Stephen. **M31: A Family Romance.** Sphere/Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10078-0, 214pp, paperback, £3.99. (Borderline sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; it is described as "an explosive black comedy of the shape of family life to come.") Late entry: published 21st September but not received by us until October.

## Magazines Received October-November 1989

The following is a list of all English-language sf- and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by Interzone during the period specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted seamount.)

**Aboriginal Science Fiction** no. 18, November-December 1989. 68pp. Ed. Charles C. Ryan, PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA. Bimonthly fiction magazine. US quarto size, with some full-colour illustrations. Contributors: Esther M. Friesner, Phillip C. Jennings, James Morrow, etc. ("Special Blasphemy Issue.") \$14 per annum, USA; \$17 overseas.

**Back Brain Recluse** no. 14, Autumn 1989. 64pp. Ed. Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbys. S40 3LA. Quarterly semi-professional fiction magazine. A5 size, with laminated cover and black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Michael Cobley, D. F. Lewis, t. Winter-Damon & Don Webb, etc. £4.50 per annum, UK; \$14, USA.

**Comms Plus!** no. 1, October-November 1989. 24pp. Ed. Malcolm Arnold, 3 Bridge Terrace, Bridge Street, Morley, Leeds LS27 0EW. "Introducing the UK's first and foremost magazine for Comms Users, Multi User Gamers, and Online Science Fiction & Fantasy." Bimonthly, semi-professional, A4 size, on glossy paper, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: John Wallbridge, Jim Trash, etc. £6 per annum, UK; no overseas rates shown.

**Critical Wave** no. 13, September 1989. 24pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Bimonthly sf-and-fantasy news magazine. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Steve Green, D. West, etc. £5 per annum, UK; \$10, USA. (Note: they've started to date it, which is only sensible in a news magazine; but it's a pity this issue dated "September" didn't reach us – and other readers? – until well into October.)

**Dagon** no. 26, October-December 1989. 60pp. Ed. Carl T. Ford, Dagon Press, 11 Warwick Rd., Twickenham, Middx. TW2 6SW. Quarterly semi-professional magazine devoted to dark fantasy. A5 size, with laminated cover and black-and-white illustrations, nicely produced. Contributors: D. F. Lewis, etc. (this is a special issue devoted to him). £7.50 for six issues, UK; \$20 sea-mail or \$30 airmail, USA.

**Fantasy Zone** no. 2, November 1989. 40pp. Ed. Louise Cassell, c/o Marvel Comics Ltd., Arundel House, 13/15 Arundel St., London WC2R 3DX. Monthly "media guide to fantasy and science fiction." US quarto size (almost), with some full-colour illustrations, a pull-out poster, etc. Contributors: hard to say. £1.25 per issue. (Note: this is the second appearance of a new British juvenile-oriented movie-and-TV mag; coverage of books is still limited to just one page out of 40, and there's no fiction.)

**Fear** no. 11, November 1989. 76pp. Ed. John Gilbert, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Monthly horror-movie magazine with fiction (six stories this time). A4 size, with some colour illustrations. Contributors: Christopher Fowler, etc. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe.

**Fear** no. 12, December 1989. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Monthly horror-movie-cum-fiction magazine (six stories this issue). A4 size,



with some colour illustrations. Contributors: Jonathan Carroll, Kim Newman, etc. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe. (Note: the cover price has risen from £1.50 to £1.95.)

**Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine** no. 149, November 1989. 192pp. Ed. Gardner Dozois, c/o Davis Publications Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, USA. Monthly (actually appears 13 times a year) fiction magazine of high repute. Digest size (i.e. same size as *Reader's Digest*), with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Orson Scott Card, Megan Lindholm, Robert Silverberg, Walter Jon Williams, etc. \$25.97 per annum, USA; \$30.67, overseas.

**Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine** no. 150, December 1989. 192pp. Ed. Gardner Dozois, c/o Davis Publications Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, USA. Monthly (13 times a year) fiction magazine. Digest size, with black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Karen Joy Fowler, Judith Moffett, Kim Stanley Robinson, Gene Wolfe, etc. \$25.97 per annum, USA; \$30.67, overseas.

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 345, October 1989. 68pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine of high quality. US quarto size, with colour cover and advertising inserts. Contributors: Edward Bryant, Richard Curtis, Fritz Leiber, etc., plus C. J. Cherryh interview. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamail or \$50 airmail, Europe (the UK agent is Fantast (Medway) Ltd., PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU).

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 346, November 1989. 80pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover. Contributors: the usual, plus Frederik Pohl interview. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamail or \$50 airmail, Europe. (Note: we're very pleased to see they survived the recent earthquake in Oakland.)

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 347, December 1989. 72pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover. Contributors: the usual, plus David Brin interview. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamail or \$50 airmail, Europe. (Note: it seems the earthquake was nothing much, to judge from the relaxed account of it Charlie Brown gives here.)

**Metaphysical Review** no. 14, November 1989. 40pp. Ed. Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box, 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Irregular "personalzine," not to be confused with Gillespie's other occasional fanzine, *SF Commentary*. A4 size, with few illustrations but nicely produced. This is the "Music Issue," with articles on Roy Orbison, Dmitri Shostakovich and others. Contributors: John Bangsund, Russell Blackford, Leigh Edmonds, etc. \$A25 for six issues, Australia; £15, UK; \$25, USA (the latter two rates are airmail).

**New York Review of Science Fiction** no. 14, October 1989. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell, etc., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly critical magazine of high quality. US quarto size, with no illustrations. Contributors: Alexei & Cory Panshin, Michael Swanwick, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36 overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

**New York Review of Science Fiction** no. 15, November 1989. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell, etc., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570,

USA. Monthly critical magazine. US quarto size, with no illustrations. Contributors: John Crowley, Alexei & Cory Panshin, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36 overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

**Nova Express** no. 8, Summer 1989. 26pp. Ed. Michael Sumner, PO Box 27231, Austin, TX 78755-2231, USA (note new editorial address). Quarterly sf fanzine of good quality. US quarto size, with (a few) black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: David J. Schow, Walton Simons, etc. (this issue contains an interview with John Kessel). \$8 per annum, USA; \$18, overseas.

**Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter** no. 21, September 1989. 40pp. Ed. Paul Williams, PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA. Irregular newsletter for fans of the late, great Phil Dick. The format varies: this time it's booklet-shaped and devoted to an interesting close analysis by Gregg Rickman of the variant texts of Dick's novel *Solar Lottery/World of Chance*. \$6 for four issues, USA; £3.50 seamail or £6 airmail, UK.

**Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter** no. 22/23, December 1989. 20pp. Ed. Paul Williams, PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA. Irregular newsletter for fans of Dick. The format this time is US quarto size. Contributors: Lawrence Sutin, Dan Sutherland, etc. \$6 for four issues, USA; £3.50 seamail or £6 airmail, UK (the latter payable to "Philip K. Dick Soc." and sent to Keith Bowden, 47 Park Ave., Barking, Essex IG11 8QU).

**Probe** no. 77, September 1989. 72pp. Ed. Neil van Niekerk, SFSA (Science Fiction South Africa), PO Box 2538, Primrose 1416, South Africa. Monthly (?) sf fanzine. A5 size, with black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Roland Penwell-Smith, Gerhard Hope, etc. Available to members of the society at R25 per annum. (Note: this one came out of the blue, and it's the first South African fanzine we've ever seen; it's obviously been on the go for quite a while, though.)

**The Scanner** no. 7, undated (received in late November 1989). 24pp. Ed. Christopher James, 4 Dover Rd., East Cowes, Isle of Wight PO32 6RG. Quarterly semi-professional fiction magazine. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Duncan Adams, Ian Watson, etc. £5.50 per annum, UK.

**Science Fiction Chronicle** no. 122, November 1989. 46pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Don D'Amassa, Frederik Pohl, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

**Science Fiction Guide** no. 15, October 1989. 20pp. Ed. Charles Platt, 594 Broadway (room 1208), New York, NY 10012, USA. Irregular fanzine of sf comment and controversy. Half US quarto size, no illustrations. Contributors: ahem, Robert A. Heinlein (allegedly speaking from the grave, via a medium), Gregory Feeley, etc. \$1.50 per issue, USA; \$2.50, overseas ("minimum order: two issues; pay in advance for as many issues as you want").

**Turkey Shoot** no. 1, undated (received in November 1989). 8pp. Ed. Ian Sales, 56 Southwell Road East, Mansfield, Notts. NG21 0EW. Irregular fanzine devoted to reviews of "classically bad sf." A4 size, no illustrations. Amusing but decidedly flimsy. No price or subscription rates shown.

**Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association** no. 152,

October-November 1989. 28pp. Eds. Boyd Parkinson & Kev McVeigh, 11 Marsh St., Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 2AE. Bimonthly critical fanzine for the members of the BSFA. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: David Pringle (an article on the early days of *Interzone*), Dave Langford, K. V. Bailey, etc. Membership of the BSFA: £10 per annum; \$20 (or \$35 air), USA; send to British Science Fiction Association, Joanne Raine (Membership Secretary), 33 Thornville Rd., Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW. (Note: this issue came bundled with *Matrix* no. 84, a 24pp newsletter, ed. Maureen Porter; *Paperback Inferno* no. 80, a 20pp review of paperbacks, ed. Andy Sawyer; and *Focus* no. 18, a 12pp "writer's magazine," ed. Liz Holliday.)

**The Wellsian: The Journal of the H. G. Wells Society** no. 12, Summer 1989 (received in November). 52pp. Ed. Michael Draper, c/o Wells Centre, Dept. of Language and Literature, Polytechnic of North London, Prince of Wales Rd., London NW5 3LB. Irregular critical journal, of professional academic quality. A5 size, no illustrations. Contributors: David Lake, Patrick Parrinder, Leon Stover, etc. Membership of the Society: £4 per annum, UK; £5, overseas.

**White Dwarf** no. 120, December 1989. 80pp. Ed. Simon Forrest, c/o Games Workshop Design Studio, Enfield Chambers, 14-16 Low Pavement, Nottingham NG1 7DL. Monthly sf-and-fantasy games magazine. US quarto size (almost), with colour illustrations. Contributors: Jervis Johnson, William King, etc. £18 per annum, UK; £36, overseas. (Note: this is essentially a house magazine, to advertise Games Workshop's many products; it very rarely carries fiction, although there was a short story by Jack Yeovil [Kim Newman] in issue 117; *Interzone* contributor Bill King now works as an in-house writer for Games Workshop.)

## Interaction

Dear Editors:

Here's a titbit of news for you. My story "To the Letter" (IZ 27) was bought for reprinting by *Reader's Digest* for £750! That works out at about a quid for every four words – the sort of rate I like... They cut out all the best jokes, but they gave the book it was in (*Dark Night in Toyland*, Gollancz, 1989) a good plug to 20 million readers.

I have always enjoyed IZ for its fictional content, but with the arrival of number 31 I am very much aware of its value as a news medium. It was a great pleasure for me to learn from your columns that my "Dark Night in Toyland" (IZ 26) won the BSFA Award for the best short story of 1988. Nobody had bothered to inform me! Does this mean that I will get some kind of a trophy? It doesn't need to be anything elaborate. Perhaps (paraphrasing Hancock in "The Blood Donor") a simple little plaque saying: "He wroteth for others that others might be uplifted."

Bob Shaw  
Warrington



Dear Editors:

Number 32 had one of the strongest story line-ups I've seen in IZ. "Mosquito" was a truly impressive debut for Richard Calder; so difficult to believe it's only his second story. His decadent future world in which men value machinery and the trappings of technology far more than they value each other is beautifully realized. It forms a totally convincing background to this sad tale of unrequited love. Mosquito, the victim of a terrible yearning to be other than she/he is, is one of the most fully rounded characters I've come across in ages, fantastic and superbly credible at the same time, a person who instantly evokes our sympathies. I can't praise this nostalgic parable on modern times enough. Let's see more from Richard Calder, and soon.

You'd think that by now I'd have used up my stock of superlatives, but there's a few left for Nicholas Royle, a writer whose work isn't always to my taste. "The Sculptor's Hand" is a marvellously zestful and ironic story, one that is regrettably topical. Superbly readable, it deflates the caring facade of certain public figures with rapier-like wit. The denouement is a damning comment on our society, especially so because I'm certain many people wish such a thing would actually happen.

**Peter Tennant**

Thetford, Norfolk

Dear Editors:

After your uniformly weak "Space" issue, the one that followed, number 32, was a great relief. In particular, I was impressed by Richard Calder's "Mosquito." Now having read the likes of Charles Stross in the previous issue, I was rapidly coming to the conclusion that cyberpunk is like the Blues – the British are crap at it. But Richard Calder proves cyberpunk may not be a

cliché after all. Also noteworthy was Nicholas Royle's "The Sculptor's Hand." Barrington Bayley's "Death of Arlett" was pleasing... As a Green, I had my doubts about David Redd's story. Lee Montgomerie's piece was much better at attacking self-righteous fundamentalism... Ian McDonald's story looked awfully quaint and 1970s... Two brilliant stories (Calder's and Bayley's), two good ones (Montgomerie's and Royle's) and two that didn't appeal at all. All in all, your best issue in ages.

**Miles Hadfield**

Oxford

Dear Editors:

Re Charles Platt versus John Clute, "Interaction," issue 32. As a relatively new IZ reader, I write to answer Mr Clute's concluding question with a firm "yes" on my part. Mr Platt's own very enjoyable column in the same issue presupposes (quite correctly) an interest in the US market on the part of your readership... Your book reviews are excellent. Keep it up.

**Simon MacCulloch**

Edgware, Middlesex

Dear Editors:

Besides enjoying *Interzone*, I also read *Fear* magazine which I have on order at my newsagent. Was I pleased to go and get my July 1989 issue to find that the magazine was going monthly! To use the word pleased is putting it mildly. The first thing that came to mind that morning was "Interzone next?" I totally agree with IZ going monthly, if and when it does. In the meantime, I can fend off any withdrawal symptoms by reading *Fear* in between issues, though that is like taking only half a dose of your medicine.

**Nigel Dean**

Warrington

Dear Editors:

I have a few worries about twelve issues per annum. As I recall, *Extro* folded by attempting to expand too fast and without the support of its distributors. I know that you have moved slowly, but are you sure that you can manage this? Unless things have changed, most of the editorial staff are unpaid. Can you all guarantee that you can afford to spend the extra time on the magazine? Perhaps if you could start to take fees out of the business it would be a different matter...

**B.S. Cullum**

Manchester

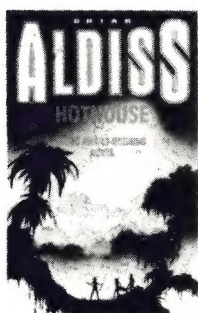
**David Pringle replies:** yes, we intend to go monthly, just like *Fear* (watch out for an announcement in our next issue). We're grateful for Nigel Dean's support and for Benedict Cullum's concern. In answer to the latter's points, we don't think the analogy with *Extro* (which ceased after three issues in 1982) will hold good. They were starting from cold and probably expected too much too soon. We have been building gradually for eight years now (!) and we continue to be cautious. Yes, we have the support of our distributors, and they will use the occasion of our going monthly to "re-launch" the magazine to the news-trade. Nevertheless, we are not pinning all our hopes on newsagent sales – there's too much competition for shelf-space from better funded magazines of all types. The crucial factor is the loyalty of our subscribers (and our advertisers) – and we're confident that we'll have both. As to payment for the editors: yes, some of us are now receiving a very small income from the magazine, and if the available funds double as a result of going monthly, then so will our wages.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE

A strong line-up of stories to herald the coming of a monthly *Interzone*. In alphabetical order, we have new fiction by: S.M. Baxter, Barrington Bayley, Thomas M. Disch, Neil Ferguson, Nicholas Royle and Brian Stableford. Plus a "Big Sellers" essay, an author interview, and all our usual features and reviews. Continue to support Britain's leading science-fiction magazine as it moves to a new schedule: don't miss *Interzone* 35 when it appears in April.



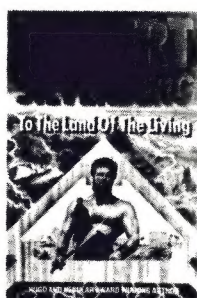
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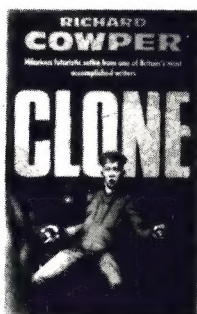


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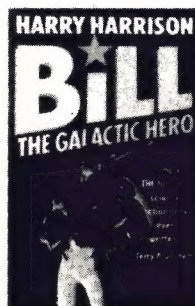
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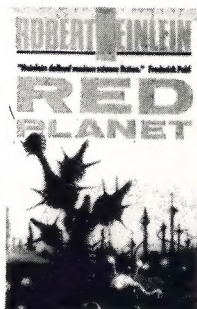


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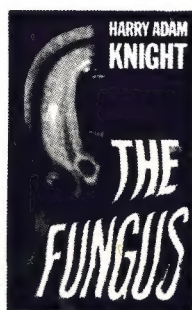
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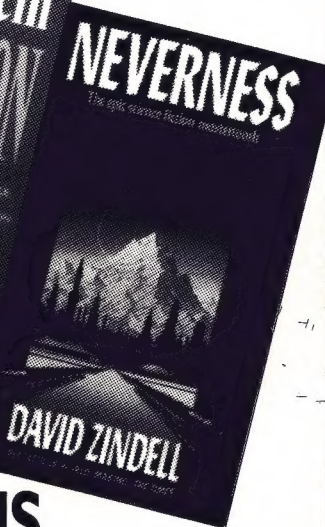
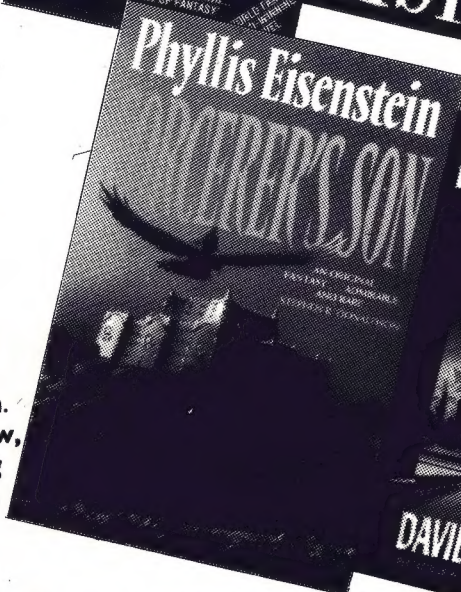
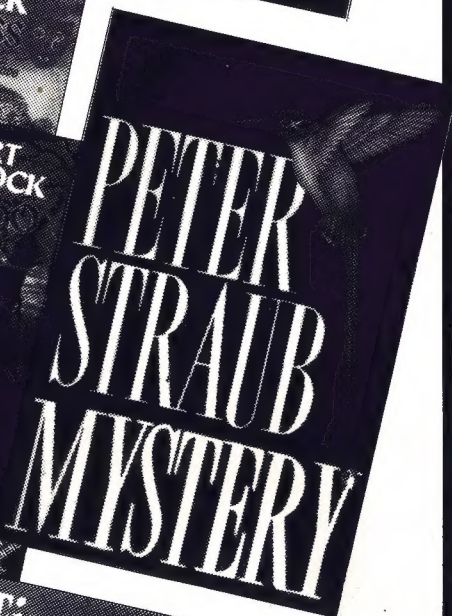
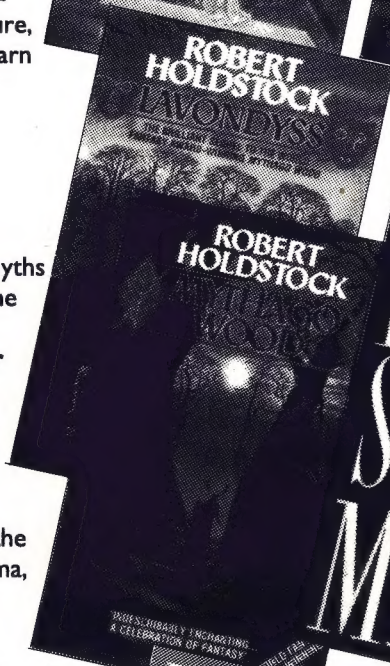
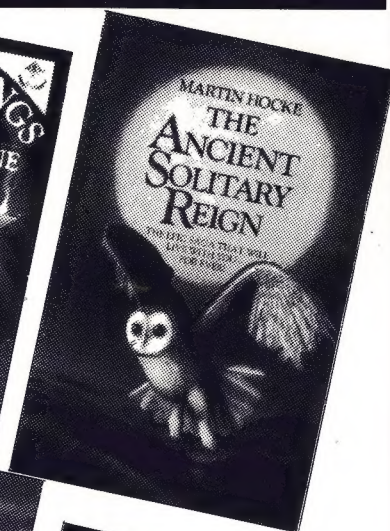
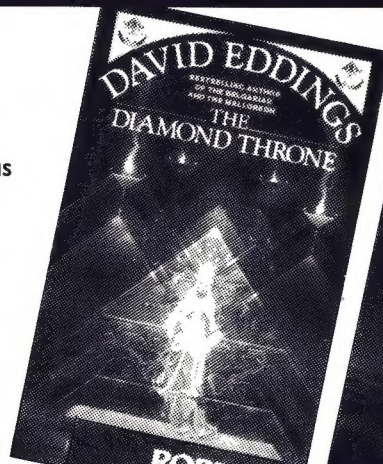
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